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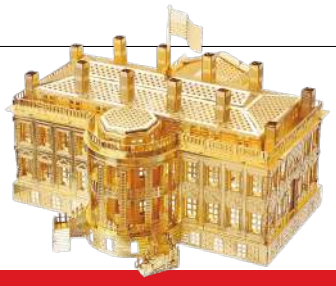

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THE WEEK
THE BEST OF THE U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

A long, hot summer

Can the GOP win back voters before the midterms?

p.6

AUGUST 7, 2026
VOLUME 26 ISSUE 1299

If you are anywhere in your journey with substance use disorder,

I want you to stop,
look around
and open your heart.

Revel in the abundance of
your existence.
See how small substance
use disorder can be when
sat next
to all that you are
or ever could be.

Fill your existence
with beauty, purpose and
a life of service.

And your substance
use disorder—
your history of addiction,
the things you
may have done
that you are not
proud of—will one day
be small enough
to deal with
while allowing you
space to live this life
of joy.

Hold on.

We are not the sum
of our scars but rather
a beautiful mosaic of the
life they hold together.

—Joseph
Washington, DC
In recovery from
substance use disorder

Learn how substance use recovery can

StartWithHope.com

NATIONAL COUNCIL *for* Mental Wellbeing

Shatterproof
Stronger than addiction

ad COUNCIL

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Christopher Nolan (p.10)

Getty (2)

Editor's letter

Albanians, who endured a half-century of tyranny, are giving Americans a lesson in democracy. Hundreds of thousands of Albanians have been pouring into the streets *every day* for two months to express their vehement rejection of Trumpism. The "Flamingo Revolution" was sparked when pro-Trump Prime Minister Edi Rama and his oligarch allies gave Ivanka Trump, Jared Kushner, and the couple's Saudi and Qatari partners approval to develop an ultra-luxurious resort on a large public island, Sazan. The island is now a cherished nature preserve, adjacent to a river delta and lagoon teeming with wildlife (including flamingos). In Albania and throughout Europe, says Isaac Stanley-Becker this week in *The Atlantic*, people are puzzled that Americans aren't standing up more forcefully to Trump's grotesque corruption; his self-serving alliance with tech oligarchs and crypto crooks; his ethnic-cleansing campaign and state-sanctioned brutality and killings; his assaults on free speech, elections, science, and the rule of law; and his disastrous war in Iran. "Even pro-American Europeans want to know: Why aren't people in the streets every day?" says Stanley-Becker.

A good question. Trump is not a dictator, but he clearly aspires to be one, and his flagrant abuses of power are *disqualifying*, or would be in any era of U.S. history except this one. Now he's openly laying the groundwork to reverse the will of the voters in November if they elect a Democratic majority in the House. If the election results are close, a constitutional crisis unlike any since the Civil War could be just a few months away. (See Best U.S. Columns, p.12.)

Perhaps Americans are too complacent after 250 years of fitful but unbroken democracy to believe it could be taken from us. Perhaps we're too well-fed and too distracted by our devices, our games, and an endless tsunami of "content." Perhaps too many of us are indifferent and disconnected. Perhaps too many of us are afraid. Or all of the above. But at this fraught moment, Albanians seem to care more about their country than we do ours.

William Falk
Editor-at-large

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The Main Stories...

More countries pulled into spiraling Iran war

What happened

The Iran war expanded further across the Middle East this week, as Saudi Arabia joined the U.S. in striking Iran-backed militias in Iraq, Yemen's Iran-allied Houthi militant group hit Saudi tankers in the Red Sea, and a U.S.-owned natural gas storage tanker at an Egyptian port was set ablaze in a drone attack. In Riyadh's first acknowledged involvement in the conflict, Saudi and American fighter jets attacked the Iraq-based Popular Mobilization Forces, an umbrella group of Iraqi militants, in retaliation for more than 30 drone attacks on Saudi oil facilities, which the U.S. accused Iran of directing. The U.S.-Saudi operation, which killed at least 20 fighters, came hours after Iran launched a surprise ballistic missile attack at American military sites in Jordan, shattering a days-long pause in fighting. The missiles were all intercepted, but the assault marked a shift in strategy for Iran, showing it was willing to go on the offensive and not simply respond to U.S. strikes. After the drone strike at Egypt's Mediterranean port of Damietta, President Trump vowed to retaliate against Tehran, saying, "It's our turn to hit them."

Ballistic missiles on display in Tehran

In the southern Red Sea, the Houthis claimed at least four attacks on Saudi-linked tankers since announcing a maritime blockade of Saudi ports last week. Iran fired on three tankers it said were using an "illegal" route through the Strait of Hormuz—Saudi Arabia's other major shipping route—and reportedly rejected a proposal from Oman to divide control of the strait and solicit voluntary fees.

What the columnists said

Iran's escalating attacks "illustrate a fundamental shift" in the war, said **Jared Malsin** and **Suha Ma'ayeh** in ***The Wall Street Journal***. The hard-line Revolutionary Guard "exerts more power than ever in Tehran," and "has grown more assertive and more comfortable with a state of war that could continue for months." It suits them better than a peace in which they'd have to confront public anger over Iran's "struggling economy." Their "zero sum" stance makes any agreement to end the war even more remote, and "heightens the risk of more-frequent rounds of escalation."

Trump has been told that "a return to major combat operations would be a hugely risky endeavor," said **Eric Schmitt** and **Jonathan Swan** in ***The New York Times***. At a meeting with Cabinet members and top advisers last week, Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Gen. Dan Caine warned such an offensive would "dangerously deplete" the military's stockpile of air defense munitions. Trump and aides "are also uneasy" about a widening war alienating Gulf allies vulnerable to Iranian attack, and a "growing energy crisis." Sources say "few if any in Trump's inner circle" believed "escalation was wise."

That interceptor shortage could put "American troops at more risk," said **Ben Finley** in the **Associated Press**. Our stockpile of Patriot interceptors has fallen from 2,330 before the war to as low as 759, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. And our stash of 452 THAAD interceptors has dropped by nearly 40%. To conserve inventories, the U.S. could "take more risks," such as firing two rather than the standard three interceptors at incoming missiles. That might prove fatal for soldiers on the ground: Last month, three U.S. soldiers were killed in Jordan after an Iranian missile slipped through air defenses.

Meanwhile, growing hostilities between Iran and Ukraine show the war's potential to "go global," said **Gideon Rachman** in the ***Financial Times***. Ukraine last week sank an Iranian vessel in the Caspian Sea it said was ferrying military cargo to Russia, drawing threats of retaliation from Tehran. Iran has supplied Russia with drones that have "killed a great many Ukrainians"; Ukraine says Russia in turn has given Iran intelligence to target American military assets. That "Ukrainians are clashing directly with Iran" is an ominous step toward a wider conflagration.

Trump is in a bind, said **Andrew Egger** in ***The Bulwark***. Through months of negotiation, Iran has offered "a steady, ironclad" position, insisting on an end to sanctions, no nuclear concessions, and control of the Strait of Hormuz. Our flailing president has toggled between "two demonstrably failed positions: If we bomb the hell out of them, they'll give us what we want. If we stop bombing them, they'll give us what we want." While he vacillates in the vain search for an exit strategy, the damage mounts. "Petroleum reserves, missile stockpiles, global trust in the U.S.-led world order—these are finite resources that are all being spent down at alarming rates."

It wasn't all bad

■ Since March, a fugitive capybara has evaded zookeepers and delighted local residents in the English countryside. The 100-pound semiaquatic South American rodent named Samba allegedly sneaked out of Marwell Zoo in Hampshire County with her sister Tango through a small gap in the fence. Tango was quickly apprehended, but Samba has spent months dodging drones, wildlife cameras, thermal imaging, and puzzled zoo officials. Locals claim to keep seeing her everywhere, even at Stonehenge.

■ A group of seniors has been cleaning up the ponds of Cape Cod, and their team is so popular there's a waitlist. The Old Ladies Against Underwater Garbage was started in 2018 by Susan Baur, now 86, who began enlisting friends to help her salvage the junk she'd find while swimming in Falmouth, Mass. They formalized the group a few years later and set entry requirements: Members had to be at least 64, able to swim half a mile in under 30 minutes, and able to free dive 8 feet. They've since had to cap the club's membership at 30. Together, in masks and snorkels, they clean about 20 ponds a year and have collectively salvaged 3 tons of trash. "The turtles and the fish, they're all clapping," said Diane Hammer, 70.

Cape Cod's cleanup crew

■ A teenager's rescue of a drowning man in the Yellowstone River was straight out of a Western movie. Jory Thomas, 14, was camping with his family near Greycliff, Mont., when he spotted a man struggling to keep his head above the rapids while clinging to a cooler. Thinking quickly, Jory grabbed his 12-foot rodeo lariat, crossed a waist-deep channel, and sprinted downriver to reach him. Jory, who learned to rope cattle at his ranch, delivered a perfect lasso toss and dragged the man ashore. "Luckily, I caught him first try," Jory said.

Getty, Billy Hickey/The New York Times

Illustration by Howard McWilliam.
Cover photos from Getty, Piececool, Getty

...and How They Were Covered

Fauci sidesteps Senate questioning

What happened

In a dramatic showdown at the Senate this week, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the public face of the pandemic response over two administrations, refused to answer senators' questions about Covid's origins and declared that Sen. Rand Paul had an "unhinged obsession" with prosecuting him. Paul, who called the hearing, said there was a "mountain of evidence" that the virus originated at China's Wuhan Institute of Virology and that the federal agency Fauci led funded dangerous gain-of-function research at that lab. Fauci has consistently denied that, and most experts believe the virus emerged in the wild. The 85-year-old immunologist accused Paul of trying to trap him into perjury, saying the point of the hearing was "to get me to say something that could vindicate his repeated public pledges that I end up, in his words, 'behind bars.'" Fauci was given a preemptive pardon by President Joe Biden, but it's unclear whether that covers perjury. He repeatedly invoked his Fifth Amendment right not to answer, even as senators goaded him with questions like "What color tie are you wearing?"

Fauci: 'I respectfully decline to answer.'

Earlier, Paul released excerpts from a diary Fauci kept on a government server, saying that "what he wrote privately and what he told the country are two different stories." In one entry, Paul said, Fauci admitted that only two of the 12 scientists he consulted in February 2020 were certain the virus had a wild origin, while at the time the doctor was publicly dismissing any possibility of a lab origin. Paul said he'd seek to hold Fauci in contempt of Congress, saying, "There will be repercussions to your refusal to testify."

What the columnists said

"Fauci got a lot wrong during the pandemic," said ***The Free Press*** in an editorial, including calling for school closures that damaged a generation of children. Now these "deeply embarrassing" diary entries show him reveling in his pandemic fame and gushing over the flattery of celebrities. But the diaries "do more" than expose his narcissism, said **Jack Butler** in ***The Wall Street Journal***. "They also provide evidence of deliberate deception." In late January 2020, while publicly claiming the virus came from a Wuhan live-animal market, Fauci privately wrote: "We know the market was not the source, it was the amplifier."

Yet that was written "very early on" in the pandemic, said **Ari Daniel** in ***NPR.org***, before all the information was in. At that time, Fauci was under dual pressure to trace the outbreak and to prevent mass panic. "We make the best conclusions we can with the data we have at the time," says virologist Felicia Goodrum, but you "keep working" and "ultimately revise the original conclusions."

Republicans have made Fauci out to be some kind of demon, said **Katherine J. Wu** in ***The Atlantic***. Some of them insist that he wasn't simply mistaken or inept, but that he actually "played a role in starting the pandemic" by funding research that made coronaviruses more deadly. There is no evidence of that wild claim, but because people believe it, he has to travel with a self-paid security detail. With public health so dangerously politicized, in future pandemics the "voice of science may not be heard at all."

Haitians brace for immigration crackdown

What happened

More than 330,000 Haitian migrants were set to lose their ability to legally live and work in the U.S. this week, clearing the way for the Trump administration to conduct mass immigration raids in their communities and ramp up deportations to gang-violence-plagued Haiti. As *The Week* went to press, a Supreme Court ruling that allows the White House to end Temporary Protected Status for Haitians and 6,000 Syrians was poised to come into effect, with the Department of Homeland Security warning that the TPS recipients' "free trial of America has ended." Fox News reported that Immigration and Customs Enforcement was preparing to target the affected migrants in places like Springfield, Ohio—home to a large Haitian community that President Trump baselessly claimed during his 2024 presidential campaign had been eating cats and dogs. One Haitian woman who works as a nurse in Florida and is a mother to a U.S.-born toddler told *The New York Times* that her "anxiety is indescribable."

Meanwhile, the Trump administration is ramping up its immigration crackdown at U.S. airports. While ICE has been working with the Transportation Security Administration since last year to detain travelers with deportation orders, recent operations have also targeted people who have overstayed visas, including migrants seeking residency through their American spouses and those with active asylum claims. "You are talking about people with legitimate pending applications," said Ghassan Shamieh, an immigration lawyer. "Not people with criminal records."

What the columnists said

Haitians and Syrians living in the U.S. with TPS have "been in panic mode" since the Supreme Court's decision, said **Jenice Armstrong** in ***The Philadelphia Inquirer***. We're not talking about illegal aliens. They own homes, have jobs, pay taxes. Now what are they supposed to do? Where do they go? And "do they take their American-born children with them?"

"Kicking Haitians out" will also hurt the economy, said **Jacqueline Charles** in the ***Miami Herald***. Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, a Republican and "longtime supporter of Haiti's causes," noted that Haitians fill many essential jobs, including in the healthcare sector. About 70% of Haitian people who have TPS are employed, said **Gisela Salomon** and **Matt Sedensky** in the **Associated Press**, which means the labor force just lost roughly 230,000 people overnight. After work authorization for his Haitian cooks and busboys ended this week, one Key West, Fla., restaurateur was worried about "whether he has enough staff" to operate.

The Trump administration is driving Haitians into "an active war zone," said retired **Lt. Gen. Russel L. Honoré** in ***The New York Times***. Haiti, an island nation dominated by "armed gangs," is on the verge of "total state collapse." The White House knows that it's incredibly dangerous. If it didn't, it wouldn't maintain "a Level 4 'Do Not Travel' advisory" for the country. Forcing hundreds of thousands of people there will only worsen the humanitarian crisis and "feed the chaos."

Getty

Controversy of the Week

Midterms: Will a summer of campaigning save Republicans?

Members of Congress are leaving Washington for their summer recess, said **Calen Razor** in ***Politico***, but the break will be anything but relaxing for GOP lawmakers. With less than 100 days left before the midterm elections, and with Democratic candidates up by an average of 6.1 percentage points in the generic ballot, Republicans must now spend five anxious and "potentially grueling" weeks at home in their districts. They'll try to somehow persuade voters not to punish them in November for the high cost of living, an unpopular war in Iran, and the failures and excesses of President Trump—whose approval rating has flatlined below 40%, and who is loudly and regularly attacking Senate Republicans for failing to pass his "SAVE America Act" package of voting restrictions. Parties in power usually lose seats in the midterms, said **Liz Goodwin** and **Ben Binday** in ***The Washington Post***, and November was going to be "tough no matter what" for Republicans, given Trump's sagging poll numbers. But with the Iran war heating up again, pushing gas prices back above $4, some GOP pollsters are "raising the alarm" about the widening enthusiasm gap between the two parties' voters. While Democrats are champing at the bit, Republicans are "listless and demotivated," with about 1 in 5 "reliable Republican base voters" saying they may stay home on Election Day, or even vote Democrat.

Johnson: The odds aren't in his favor.

Republicans should be doomed, said **Chris Stein** in ***The Guardian***, but Democrats have their "own woes." For starters, the party is broke. While the Republican National Committee has nearly $130 million in cash, most of it from wealthy donors, the Democratic National Committee is $2 million *in debt*. If the midterms were held today, Democrats would be favored to at least win back the House, said **Julia Mueller** in ***The Hill***. The latest forecast from Decision Desk HQ suggests they'll win a 15-seat advantage in the chamber and send House Speaker Mike Johnson's caucus back into the minority. But that's down 10 seats from early July, and it doesn't help that Democrats are now attacking one another in a "bitter" public argument over the party's future.

That debate has been a "gift" to Republicans, said **Mona Charen** in ***The Bulwark***. Earlier this year, the GOP had "nothing to run on" and seemed headed for a deserved drubbing in November. But candidates aligned with the Democratic Socialists of America then scored a succession of Democratic primary wins, in New York and Colorado. The DSA's platform calls for abolishing prisons, borders, and the presidency, while pushing sky-high taxes to fund a worker's paradise of "free everything"—a set of policies seemingly designed to repel swing voters. The DSA's rise has given the GOP its "midterm message," said **Ed Kilgore** in ***New York***. Republicans can and will now frame the midterms as a "vast ideological struggle" against Radical Socialism, with Trump and the GOP, for all their flaws, as the "safer bet."

Much may hinge on the "final wild card" of the season, said **Hans Nichols** in ***Axios***: Michigan's Aug. 4 Senate Democratic primary between centrist Rep. Haley Stevens and "progressive insurgent" Abdul El-Sayed. A leftist Muslim with a habit of "equivocating about terrorism" may not be able to win in a Midwest swing state, said **Nick Catoggio** in ***The Dispatch***. But will this "new red scare" really make the electorate as a whole forget 21 months of rising prices, ICE killings, weaponized government, and "lascivious corruption"? Socialism may be an "albatross" around Democrats' necks, but "it's likely less of one than Trump is for Republicans."

Only in America

■ A Colorado woman's health insurance claims are being denied because her name is too long. The trouble began when Carrie Ann Weinberger Morneault switched Medicare Advantage insurers last year. The new insurer truncated her name to comply with Medicare's character limit, creating a mismatch with her Social Security records. Weinberger Morneault said she's now considering changing her name to something shorter, but feels "I shouldn't have to."

■ Male-only gyms are springing up nationwide, catering to Christian men in search of a "lust-free" environment. Mitch Parsons, of Denver's The Remnant Gym, says he founded the facility after growing "tired of having [female] nakedness shoved in my face" at other gyms. In Oklahoma City, Jeff Hambrecht says that without the "temptations of women," members of his Proverbs 27:17 Fitness can more effectively train to become "warrior-king spiritual leaders."

Good week for:

Thrift, after a hiker who accidentally impaled himself through the torso with a trekking pole near the summit of Montana's 12,800-foot Granite Peak spent six hours descending the mountain rather than spring for a pricey helicopter rescue. "I knew it wasn't deep," shrugged David Cifaldi, 32, a wound nurse at a hospital in Billings, Mont.

Aging lotharios, after scientists discovered that sildenafil, the active ingredient in Viagra, may help slow the spread of cancer. The effect was observed in a lab, but an analysis of health records also found an association between Viagra use and higher survival rates for some cancers.

Daddy issues, after President Trump told an audience of Michigan autoworkers that "I've done more for you than your parents." Trump clarified that "your parents are good. I'm not going to knock your parents. But I have been better to you than your parents."

Bad week for:

The diarrhea diet, after U.S. medical professionals warned the public not to follow the advice spreading online that they can get "cyclospora skinny" by eating lettuce tainted with the intestinal parasite. "Getting any kind of illness to purposely cause something like that is just a bad idea," said Arizona physician Andrew Carroll.

Superheroes, after Disney-owned animation studio Pixar announced the layoffs of 108 employees in a document that included an image of Mrs. Incredible, aka Elastigirl, in the letterhead.

Cold feet, after the arrest for arson of a Utah bride-to-be, who on the eve of her wedding allegedly set fire to the church where she was set to marry. Lenita Moreno, 25, was also charged with retail theft, because the lighter used to start the fire was allegedly shoplifted from a hardware store.

In other news

Trump asks Supreme Court to let him limit mail-in voting

The Trump administration this week asked the Supreme Court to greenlight an executive order that would place major restrictions on mail-in voting ahead of the midterm elections. The March order would force states to create lists of eligible voters based on data from the Social Security Administration and the Department of Homeland Security. The Postal Service would then use those lists to determine who gets to vote by mail. More than 20 Democratic-led states sued, arguing the lists would likely disenfranchise eligible voters. A district judge blocked the order in June, ruling that "the Constitution does not grant the President any specific powers over elections." An appeals court upheld that decision last week, prompting Trump to go to the Supreme Court. The Justice Department argues that the judge's block is premature, because the administration is still developing guidelines related to Trump's order.

Getty

The U.S. at a Glance

Seattle

Deadly shoot-out: Gunfire erupted at a popular food festival near Seattle's Space Needle, leaving three dead and four wounded, including a 2-year-old boy. Police said this week that the shooting appeared to be gang-related. A witness said he saw a 15-year-old suspect holding a handgun and firing into the crowd gathered for the event, which attracts hundreds of thousands of people. The 15-year-old was arrested and another suspect, 19-year-old Junior Cee Niko Semo, was detained and later died of a gunshot wound. Authorities are still searching for a third possible suspect. Two bystanders—a 44-year-old man and a 56-year-old woman—were killed in the crossfire, and four others were hit by bullets and taken to the hospital. "It was a stampede," one attendee said of the panic as shots rang out. "An entire community is trying to understand how a gathering built around culture, connection, and joy ended in gunfire," said Seattle Mayor Katie Wilson.

Violence at a food event

Parma, Ohio

GOP seat in jeopardy: Mounting domestic violence allegations this week threatened to derail an Ohio Republican's re-election campaign, leading party leaders to fear they could lose a previously safe House seat in November's midterms. Rep. Max Miller, a former aide to President Trump, is accused of abusing his 2-year-old daughter and his ex-wife, Emily Moreno, the daughter of Sen. Bernie Moreno (R-Ohio). Emily Moreno said Miller held a gun to her head, threw hot water on her, hit her head pushing her against a wall, and was responsible for his daughter's fractured collarbone and injured shoulder. "Daddy kill you," the young child once told Moreno, according to court documents. Miller vociferously denies the allegations and has accused Moreno of being mentally ill and a stalker. GOP leaders worry the controversy could cost them a seat in a critical midterm election where they risk losing control of the House, but Miller refused to consider dropping out of the race. "Texas is turning blue like I'm losing my seat," he declared.

Miller

Lansing, Mich.

Outbreak spreads: A former top FDA official this week called for an independent review of the government's handling of the diarrhea-causing cyclosporiasis outbreak as cases topped 11,500 across 41 states, with the vast majority of them in Michigan. The FDA has linked the outbreak to lettuce from Taylor Farms. The produce giant, which in 2025 donated $1 million to a President Trump–linked PAC, contacted the White House in mid-July to raise concerns that its ties to the outbreak were being overstated. Days later, the FDA retracted one test result it said was a false positive but said it still supported Taylor Farms' voluntary recall of iceberg lettuce from Mexico. Health officials in North Carolina last week said their investigation suggests parsley and cilantro may be behind recent increases in cases. Trump's former top food-safety official, Frank Yiannas, said the FDA has bungled its response to the outbreak, which began in May. "It is starting to approach a catastrophic level," he said.

Arlington, Va.

Air Force One targeted: A credible threat that Iranian proxies were targeting President Trump prompted officials to abandon a Qatari-donated Boeing jet that was being used as Air Force One for a return flight from Turkey last month, *The New York Times* reported. Trump had flown to Ankara for the NATO summit on the donated luxury aircraft, which he was eager to showcase after demanding the plane be rushed into use. Trump was said to have been personally involved in the plane's overhaul, which led to ballooning costs—and trade-offs in security features. Sources told the *Times* that a threat emerged while Trump was at the summit. The Secret Service urged Trump to switch to an older plane with a full suite of security measures. The Justice Department last week withdrew subpoenas for the phone records and sources of five *Times* journalists who reported on the plane switch.

Washington, D.C.

Graham honored: National and world leaders this week attended the funeral of Sen. Lindsey Graham, and held a series of high-stakes meetings behind the scenes. During a service at Washington National Cathedral, President Trump eulogized the South Carolina Republican, who died in July at age 71, calling him "one of the great figures" in Senate history. "Virtually everyone" liked Graham, Trump joked—"well, not everybody. But it sounds good." Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu were in attendance, and they separately met with Trump to advance goals that the hawkish Graham supported. Zelensky requested more U.S. military aid to help push back Russia's invasion of Ukraine, while Netanyahu aimed to diffuse tensions with Trump and keep him engaged in the Iran war. In Graham's honor, the Senate this week voted 86-12 to advance a bill that would impose sweeping new sanctions on Russia and Iran.

Graham's sister

Washington, D.C.

Retribution: The Trump administration admitted to canceling billions of dollars in grants out of vengeance against blue states, *The New York Times* reported last week. When the White House eliminated over $7.5 billion in clean energy grants in October, officials claimed they were simply trying to keep taxpayer money from going to waste. But that wasn't true. In a little-noticed July court filing, an Energy Department official acknowledged cutting 284 grants "based solely" on politics. All but one grant recipient was located in a state that voted for Kamala Harris in 2024 and has two senators who caucus with Democrats. The administration left untouched 340 energy grants in red states, even though the Energy Department had recommended canceling them as well. The filing was part of a class-action lawsuit aiming to reverse the administration's move. President Trump knows "how important these Biden-era grants were to the American people," said Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-Md.), "which is why he did not cut them off to the red states."

Raskin

AP, Getty, AP, Getty

The World at a Glance

Popular target

Toronto

U.S. Consulate shooting: The U.S. Consulate in Toronto was targeted this week in an overnight drive-by shooting, the second such attack in five months. Nobody was injured, but the facade was damaged. Toronto police parked outside the building chased a white Honda Accord with no license plates for nearly an hour, reaching speeds of 90 mph in the city streets, but ultimately gave up. The consulate was first targeted in a similar drive-by in March, and two men, Sheldon Tracy-Stewart, 18, and Zara Jabbi, 19, were charged in that shooting in June. Because of the war in the Middle East and the widespread anger at the U.S. over President Trump's tariffs and annexation threats, Canada beefed up security at U.S. diplomatic offices months ago.

The Hague, Netherlands

Prosecutor fired: International Criminal Court member states removed top prosecutor Karim Khan last week after a 20-month investigation into sexual misconduct allegations. Khan, who elevated the ICC's visibility by issuing an arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over alleged Gaza war crimes, was accused of sexual assault by a staff member in 2024. A second person, an unpaid intern, accused him of sexual misconduct in 2025. Khan denied wrongdoing but took voluntary leave, and the ICC's oversight body suspended him in June, setting up a final review by member states. The Trump administration in July called for the court to be dismantled.

Khan: Out

An unprecedented blaze

Bordeaux, France

Intense wildfires: More than 330,000 people in France and Spain were forced to evacuate this week, fleeing ferocious wildfires expected to intensify in the summer's fourth record heat wave. In June, France logged more than 5,700 excess deaths attributed to the heat. The blazes have burned more than 300,000 acres, destroying hundreds of homes and buildings. The Gironde fire alone, France's worst since World War II, has blackened an area four times the size of Paris. "This is an unprecedented fire that we have never seen before in France," said Sophie Brocas, the top federal official in the department of Gironde. "It's a fire that can create its own wind, that can jump several kilometers."

San Andrés Villa Seca, Guatemala

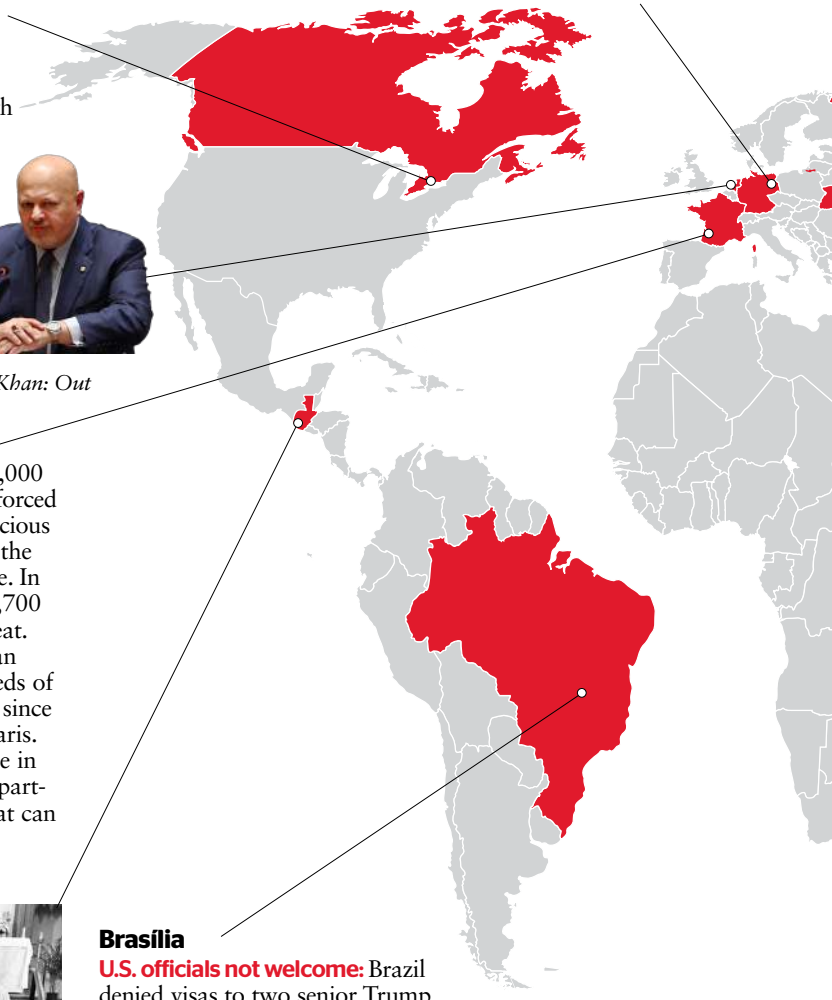
The slain couple

Deportee killed: A Guatemalan man who was deported from the U.S. and his wife, who self-deported, were found bound and shot dead in a sugarcane field last week, their 14-month-old American daughter crying by their side. Nixon Giovanni Pérez Paz, 43, and his brother were last year detained by ICE in Overland, Mo., while driving to a roofing job; both were deported shortly afterward. His wife, González de la Cruz, 25, left the U.S. along with the couple's three daughters just a few weeks ago, to reunite the family. Relatives said the family had originally left Guatemala to escape the rampant violence. "If immigration hadn't picked up my brother, my sister-in-law would still be alive, and the children wouldn't be going through this sorrow," said Rolando Pérez Paz, Nixon's brother, who said he would now raise the three girls.

Berlin

Preventable?

Pride attack: A man known to authorities as an Islamist radical plowed a van into a crowd at a Berlin Pride event last week, killing one woman and wounding 29 other people. The driver, Abdul Ballout, 21, a German with Lebanese roots, was fatally shot by police after he rushed officers while brandishing a knife. Ballout had traveled to Lebanon in 2025 with the intent of joining ISIS in Syria. He was arrested and extradited back to Germany, where a court convicted him of "preparing a violent act" but suspended the sentence. He was released in May with orders to attend a deradicalization program. Chancellor Friedrich Merz called for stricter monitoring of such cases, saying Ballout should not have been allowed near Pride.



Brasília

U.S. officials not welcome: Brazil denied visas to two senior Trump administration officials this week, accusing them of planning to interfere in the country's October presidential election. The State Department said the delegation—including Riley Barnes, an assistant secretary, and Samuel Samson, a deputy assistant secretary—had planned to visit the capital, Brasília, to hold meetings on election integrity, religious freedom, and freedom of expression. Brazilian officials said their real goal was to spread doubts about the voting system so they could discredit the elections if Flávio Bolsonaro, a Trump ally who is the son of jailed former president Jair Bolsonaro, fails to unseat leftist President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. "It is completely incompatible with Brazilian democracy," a Brazilian official told *The Washington Post*. The State Department called the allegation a "baseless lie."

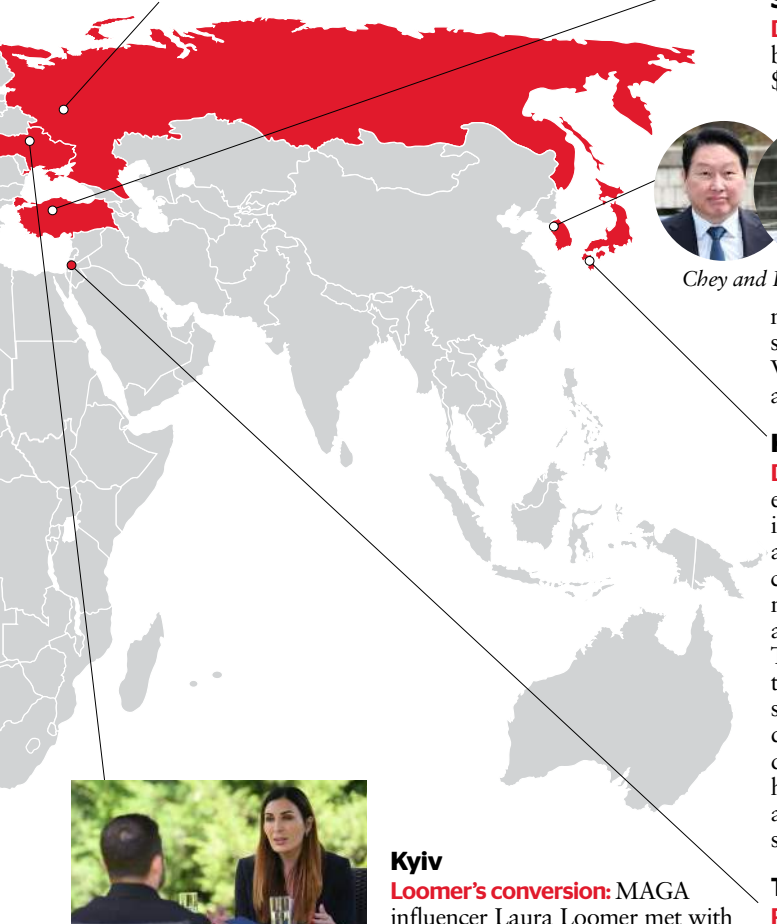
Reuters (2), Getty, Reuters

The World at a Glance

Durov

Moscow

Targeting Telegram: Russia charged Telegram founder Pavel Durov with aiding terrorism this week, accusing the 41-year-old billionaire of letting Ukraine use his wildly popular messaging app to recruit spies and "coordinate sabotage and terrorist acts." Ukraine has been hammering energy infrastructure and retail warehouses deep inside Russia in recent weeks, bringing the war home to ordinary Russians. Russia has tried to block Telegram as part of President Vladimir Putin's push to control internet and digital communications during the war, but 65 million Russians still manage to use the platform daily. The Kremlin said it was putting the Russian-born Durov, who lives in Dubai, on an international wanted list. Durov responded through Telegram's official account on X, which posted a picture of him giving the middle finger.



Zelensky and Loomer

Kyiv

Loomer's conversion: MAGA influencer Laura Loomer met with President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv last week and expressed sympathy for Ukraine's plight, a stark reversal for the right-wing provocateur. Loomer said she once believed that Ukraine had started the war and was "full of Nazi apologists"—echoing the allegations Russian President Vladimir Putin used to justify his 2022 invasion—but that she had changed her mind after seeing the country for herself. She wrote later on social media that she regretted falling for Russian propaganda and predicted that more MAGA supporters would join her once they "wake up to the reality that Russia is helping Iran kill Americans." Loomer, who visited the frontline city of Kharkiv, wrote online that "one thing I really love about Ukraine is I haven't seen a single Muslim here."

Ankara

Cicekli

Too racy: A Turkish provincial governor lost his job last week after he posted social media photos of himself wearing snug cycling tights. The images of Mehmet Fatih Cicekli, governor of Ardahan, went viral across Turkey. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan gave no official reason for firing Cicekli. But members of Erdogan's ruling party, which has a conservative Islamic agenda, had said the governor's attire was not appropriate and that other lawmakers wore modest sweatpants to work out. "A governor cannot visit the public in tights while on duty," said former lawmaker Samil Tayyar. "It does not align with the seriousness of the state." More than 10,000 people signed a petition to get Cicekli reinstated. "I'm an athlete," Cicekli said. "The clothes I'm wearing are sportswear."

Seoul

Chey and Roh, apart

Divorce payout: A South Korean court last week ordered AI tech billionaire Chey Tae-won to pay his ex-wife, Roh Soh-yeong, $645 million, capping what local media hailed as the "divorce of the century." The two were a power couple in the 1980s: he the scion of the country's second-largest conglomerate, she the daughter of South Korea's first president following military rule. The marriage soured in 2015 when Chey, who had just received a presidential pardon after being jailed for corruption, announced he was leaving his wife for a younger woman who had borne his child. Roh demanded nearly half of Chey's fortune, which as the divorce dragged on soared to $5 billion with the growth of his chip-making company. While analysts had expected Roh to get at least $1 billion, her award is still one of the largest in South Korean history.

Kumamoto, Japan

Aeon Mall Kumamoto

Damaging quake: A magnitude-6.8 earthquake shook Japan's southern main island of Kyushu this week, triggering a frantic search to dig people out of collapsed buildings, including a shopping mall and a paper factory. "This is a race against time," said Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi. At least 18 people were killed in the quake, and some 300,000 people were evacuated to emergency shelters. Many others slept in their cars, afraid to go indoors as dozens of aftershocks continued to rattle the region for days. The quake crumpled roads, knocked out power, and damaged several historic structures, including a stone wall at Kumamoto Castle and the gates of a 16th-century Buddhist temple. In the mall, the shocks caused a gas explosion that sounded like a bomb going off.

Tal, West Bank

Palestinian appeal: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas appealed this week to leaders of European and Arab countries to stop Israeli military aggression and settler violence against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, after Israeli settlers attacked Palestinian towns and burned down two mosques. The confrontation started last week, when armed settlers accompanied by soldiers approached the West Bank village of Tal. Video appears to show a Palestinian grabbing a settler's weapon and shooting him and then gunfire erupting; four Palestinians, a soldier, and a settler were killed. In the following days, settlers attacked numerous West Bank villages and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered what he called a "wide-scale military operation" to "regularize" the illegal settler outposts there. "Israeli state-backed settler terrorism is intensifying into systematic pogroms across the occupied West Bank," the Palestinian government said.

Getty, IHA/AP, Shutterstock (2), Reuters, Laura Loomer/X

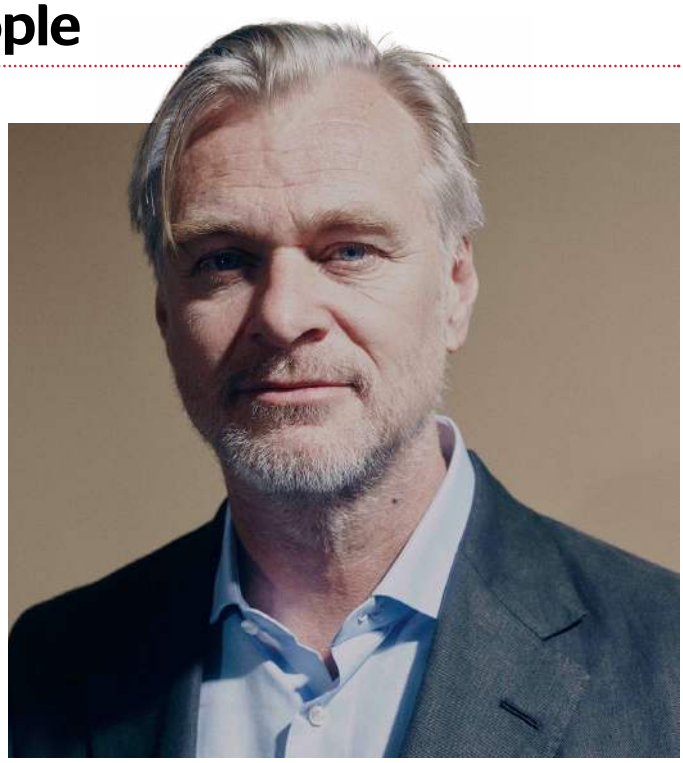
People

A *Ted Lasso* star turns pro

Cristo Fernández had his soccer dreams dashed at a young age, said Jonathan Abrams in *The New York Times*. The actor, who for three seasons portrayed the relentlessly joyful striker Dani Rojas on Apple TV's *Ted Lasso*, played professionally as a teenager in his native Mexico, but knee injuries led him to quit in his early 20s. After turning to acting, Fernández says he "tried to get away from fútbol because it was just painful to remind myself of something that I did and that I failed." Then he landed the role of Rojas, known for the catchphrase "Fútbol is life." Fernández had to "look like a professional soccer player," and, thanks to the show's success, got to meet some of his boyhood heroes, including Mexico's Jorge Campos, Luis Hernández, and Andrés Guardado. "It awakened in me this passion of playing fútbol." He decided last year that he wanted to go pro again and his father, who was initially worried that Fernández would ruin his knees, encouraged him to pursue his dream. He recently debuted with El Paso Locomotive FC, which plays in the USL Championship, the second tier of U.S. league system. Fernández, 35, is wondering how best to celebrate his first goal of the season. "Maybe a Dani Rojas celebration, just so that fiction really imitates reality. Maybe running in circles. That would be funny."

Carpenter's profitable defiance

John Carpenter's rebellious streak goes way back, said Steve Rose in *The Guardian* (U.K.). In 1953, when the *Halloween* and *They Live* director was 5, he moved with his family from upstate New York to Bowling Green, Ky., after his violinist father got a job teaching music at Western Kentucky University. "Boy, were we fish out of water," says Carpenter, 78. "It was the Jim Crow South. Everything I know about evil I learned in that small town." His father had encouraged him to learn violin, and he walked to school with the instrument under his arm. "These country boys decided I was great to beat up. I was a mark for violence with my violin, which made me hate it all the more." He embraced 1960s counterculture, protesting the Vietnam War, the system, and "all forms of authority." Carpenter was happy to defy Hollywood execs later in life, like when he refused to direct a sequel to 1978's *Halloween*. "I didn't think there was any story left." He did write 1981's *Halloween 2*, but after that Universal Pictures "took it out of my hands. But they had to pay me every time they made a movie. I sit on the couch and a check arrives in my hand. I have to admit, with all the rebellion in the world, I am a happy capitalist."



Why Nolan is happy to be a Luddite

Christopher Nolan doesn't own a smartphone, said Robbie Collin in *The Telegraph* (U.K.), and he has no desire to get one anytime soon. "You guys have all become pod people," the director of *The Odyssey*, 56, says with a laugh. Why is he so anti-phone? "Partly because I know I'd become horribly addicted. I'd spend all my time looking things up." But his aversion is also about his work. "I find I'm only able to advance my thinking on projects in those pockets of time where everybody usually jumps on their phone. Waiting for a train, in an airport, for somebody to turn up for dinner." As much as he detests phones, his greatest tech foe these days is artificial intelligence. Nolan shuns AI in his films—he used a mix of puppetry, animatronics, and computer graphics to bring *The Odyssey*'s cyclops to life—and is delighted that some younger cinemagoers and a growing number of Gen Z directors are "utterly rejecting it. I've never seen a more rapid wholesale dismissal of a supposedly foundational jump in technology." He cites his own four children, all in their late teens and early 20s and all digital natives. "Their judgment of AI 'slop' has been immediate and harsh. They see it for what it is very quickly—and it's much easier for them to identify it, because it grew out of an online world they know really well."

In the news

■ **Carly Simon** revealed this week that she has been being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. "So many people have written to me, kindly wondering about my relative silence" in recent years, she said. "The truth is, I've been learning how to live with Parkinson's." The "You're So Vain" singer, 83, said she realized something was wrong when, after undergoing knee and hip replacement surgery, "my mobility continued to worsen" to the point where she sometimes "could not walk without considerable help." During the same period, Simon also underwent surgery for skin cancer on her face, which "made me more self-conscious about being seen in public." Simon kept working during her health struggles and this month will release her first original full-length album since 2008. "Music," she said, "has rescued me more times that I can count."

■ Former *60 Minutes* correspondent **Cecilia Vega** last week accused CBS News execs of pressuring her to insert "political bias" and "misinformation" into her reporting before she was fired in May. Speaking at the National Association of Hispanic Journalists conference, Vega said she was told to add nonexistent footage of protesters attacking ICE agents to a segment on the fatal shootings of two U.S. citizens by federal officers in Minnesota, and to introduce an Iran war segment by saying Tehran is "totally outgunned" by the U.S. and Israel. She said she was also asked why she didn't interview Vice President JD Vance, who grew up in a poor Ohio town, for a report on the effects of SNAP food benefit cuts in West Virginia. Vega, 49, said she rebuffed all three requests from the "new administration at CBS News." *Free Press* founder Bari Weiss took over as editor-in-chief of the news division in October. CBS News said Vega's claims were "not based in reality."

■ **Sean "Diddy" Combs** was placed in solitary confinement after getting into a scuffle with a fellow inmate at New Jersey's Fort Dix federal prison, *TMZ* reported last week. Sources said the fight broke out after the inmate "dissed" the rap mogul, who last year was sentenced to 50 months in prison on two prostitution charges connected to the days-long "freak off" sex-and-drugs romps that he staged with male sex workers and former girlfriends. Prison staffers quickly broke up the brawl. It's unclear how long Diddy will remain in solitary; the Federal Bureau of Prisons said it does not comment on "disciplinary matters, or other information regarding individual inmates."

Erik Tanner/The New York Times/Redux, Getty (2)

Cutting the food safety net

Republicans tightened access to SNAP benefits. Millions more Americans are now going hungry.

How big a problem is hunger in the U.S.?

The nonpartisan Urban Institute reports that nearly 1 in 4 adults last year experienced household food insecurity, defined as not having enough to eat or knowing where the next meal may come from. That's up from 1 in 5 in 2020. (The Trump administration stopped collecting data on food insecurity in 2025, saying the information was used to "fearmonger.") For nearly 40 million low-income Americans, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—commonly known as food stamps—serves as a lifeline. The 62-year-old program gives recipients an average of $187 a month to spend on groceries. Qualifying households must have an annual income below 130% of the poverty line, which this year is $15,960 for a single person and $38,680 for a family of five. Nearly 80% of households receiving SNAP benefits have members who are over 60, disabled, or under 18. But more than 4 million people—including at least 776,000 children—have been dropped from the program's rolls over the past year, largely because of changes to SNAP included in the One Big Beautiful Bill (OBBB) passed by the Republican-led Congress last summer. With grocery prices up by nearly a third since 2020, a growing number of Americans are now struggling to put food on the table. "I go to sleep thinking about what are we going to [eat]," said Dee McDonald, a 65-year-old cancer survivor raising three grandsons in Mesa, Ariz., and who last year lost her SNAP benefits. "I'm exhausted."

Lining up at a food bank in Austin

What did the OBBB do?

To reduce SNAP's costs by $187 billion over the next decade, the package tightened eligibility requirements and shifted more financial responsibility to state governments. States became responsible for 75% of SNAP's administrative costs, up from 50%. The OBBB also mandated states cover up to 15% of SNAP benefits if their error rate—mistakes that lead to under- or overpayment of benefits—exceeds 6%. Error rates nationally sit above 10%, and only nine states are below that threshold; those above will face billions of dollars in new costs unless they can bring their error rates down. The OBBB also removed work exemptions from groups including adults ages 54 to 64, veterans, and parents of teenagers, all of whom must now prove they spend at least 20 hours a week working or volunteering to get benefits. Refugees were made almost completely ineligible.

What's the justification for those cuts?

The Republicans who passed the OBBB say the program had become bloated and strayed from its goal of helping society's most vulnerable; they also saw SNAP cuts as a means to finance the law's tax reductions. SNAP has expanded substantially in recent years: The number of recipients has more than doubled since the early 2000s, and the Biden administration lifted average benefits by more than 25% during the pandemic. Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins said the recent drop in SNAP enrollees is a result of a better economy, which means "people don't need food stamps," and measures in the OBBB that removed "fraudulent" claimants.

Is there much fraud in the program?

While error rates seem high, that's mostly due to unintentional mistakes—often made by caseworkers—in calculating how much an applicant should receive based on their income and expenses. And most recipients are not avoiding work to claim benefits: 89% of SNAP households with children and a working-age, non-disabled adult have at least one working member. But the OBBB is making it harder for them to get on SNAP. States are scrambling to find ways to lower error rates: more paperwork to prove eligibility, phone interviews, and AI-run wage checks. That extra workload is swamping state SNAP agencies, many of which were already understaffed. In Massachusetts, over 80% of calls to the agency that administers SNAP are now being dropped; disconnections happen automatically when there aren't enough agents to answer. Arizona has dropped nearly half of all state SNAP recipients, including Tiffany Hudson, a single mother of two who had been receiving $600 a month in food assistance to supplement her earnings as a part-time caretaker. After her benefits were cut off, she was told to provide more documentation, including a written statement that a monetary birthday gift from her father was not a recurring payment. "We've been going to food banks every week," Hudson said. "We're eating less."

Can charities make up the difference?

They're trying, amid a surge in demand. A New York Fed report in February revealed that nearly 16% of Americans now rely at least partly on donated food. Sometimes "people are sitting in a 2-to-3-mile line the night before a distribution starts," said Amy Breitmann, director of a food bank in Augusta, Ga. Beth Fiorenza's food bank in Phoenix has been receiving more than 200 people a day—up from 150 to 175—about 40% of them newcomers. "Charities do not have the capacity to make up for the shortfall," said Harvard health policy professor Sara Bleich. "For every meal that food banks provide, SNAP provides nine."

Are there more changes ahead?

An appropriations bill recently passed by the House would cut $141 million for fruit and vegetable benefits from the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, or WIC. The program, in which nearly 5.4 million children and pregnant and postpartum women are enrolled, has historically enjoyed bipartisan support, and the bill's Republican backers argue the cuts won't limit access. But Trump's own 2027 budget proposal, submitted in April, would reduce WIC's monthly fruit and vegetable allowance for children under 5 from $26 to $10. "They just don't care what they're cutting," said Myriah Hamilton, 35, a Philadelphia-area mother who receives WIC for her infant son and is struggling with the rising cost of food. "How much more do you think I can bear?"

Pressure on pantries

As states shed SNAP recipients, and as summer vacations halt the distribution of school meals, America's food banks have stepped up. But they too are struggling: Food banks have been getting fewer government deliveries after the Trump administration last year cut $500 million from the Emergency Food Assistance Program, and rising food and gas prices are eating into operating costs. As a nonprofit "we can't just add a delivery fee," said Michael Shafer, who runs a food bank in rural Michigan. Kelsey Gonzalez said her central Florida food pantry finds it hard to keep necessities in stock: "We're getting donations, and it's going right off the shelves." Even amid surging need, some pantries have had to cut back, said Claire Babineaux-Fontenot, who served as CEO of Feeding America from 2018 until this spring. The organization's network of food banks distributed nearly 6 billion meals nationwide last year, she said, but "there's not enough food. Some of the saddest things I've ever seen with food bankers is when they have to turn people away."

Getty

Best Columns: The U.S.

A legal way to steal the midterms

David French
The New York Times

Could Donald Trump and Republicans exploit a "legal loophole" to steal the midterm elections? asked David French. Unfortunately, the answer is yes. Article I, Section 5 of the Constitution says that "each house shall be the judge of the elections, returns, and qualifications of its own members." This means that the House and Senate decide who is seated in their respective chambers—and ominously, "those decisions are not reviewable by any other branch of government, including the courts." Under election law, losing House candidates can contest their defeats, and the Republican majority can decide by a simple vote to seat them even if their challenge lacks evidence of fraud or error. Trump has created multiple pretexts to declare Democratic victories in November invalid; when he inevitably does, House Speaker Mike Johnson and other Republican leaders won't defy him the way Vice President Mike Pence did in 2020. "If you think such a scenario is too far-fetched to be real," it's happened several times in American history, including in 1931, when House Democrats reversed a Republican's narrow victory. If control of the House comes down to a few seats, "we should be under no illusions about MAGA's intentions."

The Saudis' turn to be betrayed

David Frum
The Atlantic

Saudi Arabia has just learned a hard lesson about Donald Trump, said David Frum: Even showering billions on him and his family does not mean he won't betray you. For a single day last week, it appeared that the Saudis scored a breakthrough they've long sought, when they signed an agreement with U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright that allows American companies to build nuclear power plants on Saudi soil. Such a deal might open a path to uranium enrichment and "an eventual Saudi nuclear weapon." The petrostate's ruling elite must have seen the nuclear agreement as a payoff for the billions they invested in the Trump Organization and son-in-law Jared Kushner's private-equity firm. But within 24 hours, Trump posted that the deal was "totally subject" to Saudi Arabia joining the Abraham Accords—his 2020 initiative to normalize relations between the Arab world and Israel. The shocked Saudis said they intended to do no such thing. Did Trump intentionally "blow up the deal," after it received strong criticism from Republicans? No one knows. But it's more proof that no nation or person can trust any promise made by a president this "faithless, chaotic, and corrupt."

Showing why we need a free press

Brian Stelter
CNN.com

President Trump "bombed at the White House Correspondents' Dinner," said Brian Stelter—but his belligerent flailing only served to underscore the need for "America's robust First Amendment protections." Breaking his years-long boycott of the press group's annual fundraiser, Trump gave "a rambling hour-long speech" in which he personally insulted journalists and claimed to be "single-handedly keeping the news business afloat." He told "a strange number of fat jokes" and a lame sex joke that produced awkward silences. When he realized his comedy routine was falling flat, he insulted his writers, saying, "Does anyone understand this stuff?" As he droned on with his recycled insults and resentments, attendees tuned out, looked at their phones, and chatted among themselves. Trump "was just…boring." The evening took an intriguing turn when Trump had to sit through several awards for journalists he loathes, including CNN's gutsy Kaitlan Collins and *Wall Street Journal* reporters who documented his ties to Jeffrey Epstein. Embarrassed, the president merely "threw up his hands in an *aw shucks*–like gesture." The president's inability to cow or silence journalists "unwittingly underscored the theme of the dinner"—the vital necessity of a free press.

Viewpoint

"Once upon a time I imagined that America's institutions possessed some magical quality, like civic antibodies, which would cause them to resist Trumpism. I thought the Republican Party would rather lose an election than submit to Trump. I thought the conservative movement would rather move into the wilderness than bend itself to Trump. I thought the business community would rather alienate Trump than engage in cronyism. I thought the media establishment would embrace dissident status rather than pantomime the illusion of normalcy. In each case I was incorrect. Trump knew how weak American institutions were and I did not."

Jonathan V. Last in The Bulwark

It must be true… I read it in the tabloids

■ Two Utah sisters who checked into an Airbnb rental in San Diego were shocked to find themselves depicted in a framed beach photo hanging on the wall. They were very "creeped out" by the "eerie" photo, which also captured their father and other siblings, said Aubrey Birrell. "It felt really strange." She and her sister later learned from the host that the home had been decorated by a local photographer who takes aerial beach photos, and happened to capture them on a family visit 10 years earlier. "We remember the swimsuits," Birrell said.

■ Amid punishing summer temperatures, a Japanese company is marketing a personal cooling booth that's been dubbed a "human refrigerator." Roughly the size of a vending machine, the Do Hiemon box has an internal temperature of 59 degrees and air jets that blow 41-degree air at the seated occupant's head, shoulders, and back during 5-to-10-minute cooling sessions. The devices, which retail for about $9,200, are designed to be used at factories, farms, construction sites, and outdoor festivals.

■ A wheelchair-bound man struggling to get across a busy six-lane road in Jonesboro, Ark., was whisked to safety by Spider-Man. Christopher Hellenthal, 20, was driving home in a Spidey costume from a superhero-themed event when he saw the man struggling to get his chair across the wide road. Hellenthal ran from his Jeep, called out "I got you," and quickly pushed the man to the curb before the light turned. The Good Samaritan said he was thinking, "I'm wearing this suit; it's gonna be pretty funny." Police released a security camera video of the rescue, and called Hellenthal "a true superhero."

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Best Columns: International

NIGERIA

Don't force God off the bus

Lekan Sote
Punch

Nigeria is heading down the "road to godlessness," said Lekan Sote. In the name of making Nigeria's often-jammed roads safer, lawmakers passed a bill they say will eliminate driver distractions. Some of the provisions are "good and commendable," such as the introduction of roadside DUI checks and the prohibition on "hawking or trading inside buses." But it also includes a ban on preaching aboard public buses, which will now bring up to six months in jail. Punishing riders for spreading the word of Jesus Christ—or the Prophet Mohammed, or the traditional Yoruban religion, Isese—is "unnecessary overkill." Will this "asinine law" be used to round up Isese women "praying for loose change" in their morning rituals? Given the traffic noise, the drivers probably can't even "hear the evangelism." Yet even if they can, "the devil lurks in the hearts of passengers and drivers alike," so there's no harm in having somebody on board trying to ward off evil. Besides, the constitution guarantees freedom of religion, and that explicitly includes the right to share your beliefs with others. Watering down this sacred tradition threatens the "guardrails that stand between Nigerians and the collapse of morality." We don't want to end up like the West, where you can't even pray at school.

INDIA

Even devout Hindus can use sex ed

Namita Bhandare
Hindustan Times

After decades of "moral panic and dithering," India may finally be ready to allow sex ed in schools, said Namita Bhandare. In a "remarkable and welcome" development, the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party has signed off on a sex ed curriculum, and now we're just waiting for the Supreme Court to approve it. It's high time. Last time we tried this, nearly 20 years ago, BJP lawmakers refused to adopt the program experts had recommended, saying it went against Hindu culture and would corrupt young minds. Their intransigence was manifestly ridiculous—"where do these custodians think the *Kama Sutra* originated?" Silence about sex "has never protected young people." It just makes them turn to the internet for answers, where they absorb toxic, regressive views. What Indian youth need is an environment "where body parts can be named without shame" and "teachers and parents become resources rather than threats." They need frank conversations about consent, and about how to reconcile their desires with their values. Conservatives needn't worry: The lessons will take up only 15 minutes, twice a week, so it's not as if students will be getting how-to manuals. If we can shed our stereotypes about relations between the sexes, maybe we'll end up with "a more respectful, egalitarian society."

How they see us: Canadians put elbows back up

Donald Trump just rolled Canada in "another U.S. shakedown," said **David Olive** in ***The Hamilton Spectator***, this time over a desperately needed new bridge connecting our city of Windsor with Detroit just across the river. The Gordie Howe International Bridge was named after a Canadian hockey legend who played for the Detroit Red Wings, a choice intended to symbolize the bond between the two countries. Canada, which financed the $4.7 billion construction cost, was supposed to pocket the tolls until it recouped its investment, but Trump blocked the bridge's opening until Ottawa agreed to hand over half the profits for 15 years. That's "a windfall, given that the U.S. has paid practically nothing" to build it. Worse, Trump also got a veto over cuts to the toll price—which means the rival Ambassador Bridge, owned by one of his campaign donors, "will win any price war." Yet even after we agreed to "this extortionate deal," Trump hit Canada with a new round of 50% tariffs. Ottawa responded by disinviting the Americans from last week's ribbon cutting to inaugurate the bridge. The Gordie Howe is now a symbol of hostility and division.

The bridge may as well be a wall.

Canada can still stand up for itself, said **Susan Delacourt** in the ***Toronto Star***. Ontario Premier Doug Ford has vowed to "punch back" with more policies like the "booze bans"—provincial boycotts of U.S. alcohol—that have been "proving so vexatious" to Trump. "We need to stand up to the bully," Ford said, "and we need to hit him tariff to tariff." Other premiers are speaking with a "sharper edge," too. They point out that offering concessions has not protected us, even if "retaliation may not be the best option" at the national level. Prime Minister Mark Carney's "'Elbows Up' shenanigans" have clearly backfired, said **Michael Higgins** in the ***National Post***. Everybody hoped that Carney, a boring former banker, would be able to repair cross-border relations "after the obvious friction between Trump and Justin Trudeau." Instead, he goaded Trump by encouraging the boycotts of U.S. goods and by urging other countries to fight U.S. hegemony. Now it's Trump's "turn to take a hammer to the alliance," pilfering bridge tolls, imposing monster tariffs, even demanding compensation for wildfire smoke.

Ironically, though, Trump's bullying has worked out great for Carney, said ***The Winnipeg Sun*** in an editorial. Every time he stumbles, "Trump bails him out." Carney's government fumbled the negotiations on the Gordie Howe bridge, recklessly bailed out British Columbia developers, and ran up outrageous deficits. But "none of it sticks, because within days Trump says something outrageous and Canadians rally around their prime minister instead of scrutinizing him." In fact, Trump's abuse will benefit us all, said **Robyn Urback** in ***The Globe and Mail***. He's like a "bad ex." When you escape the lying, cheating, and insults of a toxic relationship, you cut your hair, get a gym membership, join a book club. Having broken up with the U.S., Canada's making healthy changes, too—increasing military spending, "diversifying our trade partners," scrapping self-destructive interprovincial trade barriers. "Living well is the best revenge, as they say," and Canada is on its way.

Reuters

Best Columns: Europe

Hungary: Restoring democracy or trampling it?

Peter Magyar is delivering the revenge Hungarians craved, said **Robert Puzser** in ***Magyar Hang*** (Hungary). After enduring "16 years of uncontrolled illiberal rule" by the Russia-friendly Viktor Orban, voters gave Magyar and his pro-European Tisza party a parliamentary supermajority in a blowout April election. Magyar said his overwhelming victory had given him a mandate to root out the autocratic apparatus of Orban's far-right Fidesz party, and now he is doing just that with a sweeping amendment to the constitution. The amendment forces the resignation of the president, Tamas Sulyok, who greenlit Orban's destruction of democracy through court packing and gerrymandering. It also creates a mandatory retirement age for justices of 70, which means the chief justice, another Orban stooge, is out. And it slaps a 12-year term limit on all members of parliament, which will purge many longtime Fidesz lawmakers. With the "unconditional omnipotence" of his supermajority, Magyar is sweeping away the "wreckage of the fallen power" at a dizzying pace.

Magyar to president: 'You're fired.'

Now who's the autocrat? asked **Tamas Pilhal** in ***Magyar Nemzet*** (Hungary). "Even the blind can see that the rule of law has ceased to exist in Hungary." In a democracy, you don't "fire the head of state with a half-sentence inserted into the constitution." Nor do you make laws apply retroactively, such as the one that limits prime ministers to two terms, barring Orban from ever returning to power. The silence of the European Union in the face of this despotism is telling. It withheld $18 billion in EU funds from Orban over democracy concerns, but it's happy to fund Magyar? By forcing out the president and the chief justice, Magyar does risk "overshooting the mark and veering into anti-democratic territory," said **Tobias Zick** in the ***Süddeutsche Zeitung*** (Germany). He is operating with "near-revolutionary zeal." Still, so far he is operating within the law. He promised voters he would remove "corrupt personnel from top positions." Anything less would be a betrayal.

Yet he may want to slow down, said **Tibor Attila Nagy** in ***Index*** (Hungary). Magyar suffered his "first real political defeat as prime minister" last week, when he publicly offered the presidency to legendary chess player Judit Polgar, a Hungarian national treasure. It was a lovely idea except that he put her on the spot without even consulting her first, and she refused the post, saying she wasn't up to the "historic responsibility of uniting a divided nation." The "amateurish mistake" shows political inexperience—before this he spent a mere two years as a member of the European Parliament—that could "undermine his authority as prime minister." Otherwise, though, Magyar has been off to a decent start with his dismantling of Orban's "propaganda machine," said **Ben Hall** and **Marton Dunai** in the ***Financial Times*** (U.K.). He's inspired institutions to reform themselves, and Hungary's main public TV station actually went dark recently, posting on a black screen: "Public media should not lie. We are sorry for doing it so long." But that was the easy part. Magyar has yet to prove he can make painful decisions, like breaking Hungary's addiction to Russian energy. Magyar is certainly comfortable "crusading against corruption and berating his predecessor." That is campaigning, though—not governing.

FRANCE

Banning social media won't work

Grégoire Borst
Libération

France has become the first EU country to ban social media for kids under 15. At first blush, it seems like a "matter of common sense," said Grégoire Borst. It's hard enough going through puberty without adding in online bullying, and adolescent girls—the most frequent social media users—"face great pressure regarding body image." France's new law forces platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram to adopt age verification. But will that really do much? Australia has already tried a similar ban, and months into the Aussie experiment, two-thirds of teens are still managing to log in. Kids keep returning to these platforms because that's their main way to stay "connected with friends." Social media does for them what "the telephone did for previous generations," and if we take it away we might end up supercharging the loneliness epidemic that began during Covid. It's easy to understand why President Emmanuel Macron was so adamant to act: He and his older wife, Brigitte, have been cyberbullied over their 24-year age gap. But what their ordeal really shows is that bullying has no age limit. A better solution would be to "hold platforms accountable for the content they host," and make social media a better space for all of us.

UKRAINE

Taking out Russia's Amazon

Sergii Kostezh
Kyiv Post

What does Kyiv have against Russia's Wildberries? asked Sergii Kostezh. The online retailer functions in Russia like "Amazon in the United States," the main site for Russians to buy everything from electronics to cosmetics to furniture. In the past few weeks, our military has sent long-range drones to blow up at least eight of the company's massive warehouses. This isn't just payback for Russia's years of illegal strikes on Ukrainian shopping centers, theaters, kindergartens, and other civilian sites. Wildberries is "far from civilian." It sells mountains of dual-use goods, including quadcopters, the "primary strike weapon for both sides." It disguises bomb-release mechanisms and payload carriers under "seemingly civilian categories" such as auto parts. In the clothing section, it sells tactical gear like ammo vests. Yet even if it were a purely civilian company, hitting it would still be a legitimate military aim. Wildberries accounts for 40% of Russia's retail sector and 10% of its total domestic trade, generating billions in tax revenue for President Vladimir Putin's war machine. And when Russians can get sanctioned imports like designer clothes and iPhones laundered through Wildberries, it makes them feel that the war "has little impact on everyday life." If bombing Wildberries makes Russians' lives "more painful," maybe they will demand an end to the war.

Getty

Talking Points

Noted

■ The Trump administration's strikes on alleged drug-trafficking boats in the Caribbean and Pacific have not reduced the amount of cocaine entering the U.S. or affected its price, availability, or purity, according to an assessment by the DEA. The 67 strikes—which have killed at least 221 people—have led drug runners to change tactics; some have swapped go-fast boats for larger vessels that avoid international waters.
The Washington Post

■ Nearly a dozen gun stores that had their licenses revoked by the Biden administration have received permission to sell guns again under President Trump. Two of the shops had together sold at least 175 guns that were recovered at crime scenes from 2021 to 2024.
CNN.com

■ The number of children under 18 living in large U.S. cities has dropped 6% over the past decade, compared with a 1% drop in that demographic nationwide. The number of children under age 5 in cities fell 15%, compared with a 7% drop nationwide. Families cite high costs, safety, and quality of life as reasons for leaving cities.
The Wall Street Journal

■ After a yearlong legal fight, the Trump administration has dropped its subpoena for a list of Jewish people employed by the University of Pennsylvania. The administration said the information would be used to identify potential victims of alleged acts of campus antisemitism. UPenn officials and Jewish groups compared the subpoena to the "lists of Jews" compiled by the Nazis.
Politico

Iran war: Are U.S. casualties being covered up?

The Trump administration has found a novel way to limit the U.S. death toll in the Iran war, said **Jack Crosbie** in ***Rolling Stone***: Claim that "some deaths don't count." Last week, the names of four service members killed by Iranian strikes in mid-July suddenly vanished from the Pentagon's official list of war dead, lowering the total from 18 to 14. U.S. officials gave differing explanations for the change, from benign "temporary data disruptions" to the claim that the troops killed in Jordan and Iraq didn't actually die in the war with Iran since "Operation Epic Fury" technically stopped when President Trump struck a temporary ceasefire with Tehran in April. Never mind that neither side ever ceased firing. After Senate Democrats and veterans groups protested the disappearance, the names of the four service members reappeared on the Pentagon website—but under a different category for "Overseas Operations," which includes only those killed and injured since July 7, when fighting fully reignited.

Bringing home the dead

This is only the latest attempt by the administration to obscure the human cost of its unpopular war, said **Edith Olmsted** in ***The New Republic***. In March, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth dismissed an Iranian drone strike on a tactical operations center in Kuwait as a "squirter," and the Pentagon said just five troops were seriously wounded. In fact, dozens of soldiers suffered injuries "including burns, shrapnel wounds, and brain trauma." And when the Pentagon restored the four dead soldiers to its online database, it also quietly upped the number of wounded personnel by more than 140—pushing total U.S. casualties in the war above 600. Trump last week tried to put a positive spin on the casualty count, said **Joe Lancaster** in ***Reason***, favorably comparing in an online post the conflict's "4 months, 18 dead" with the thousands of Americans killed in multiyear wars in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. That may be true, but "American soldiers are still dead as a direct result of the conflict he helped instigate."

This is predictable behavior from Trump, said **David A. Graham** in ***The Atlantic***. He "has frequently treated the military as a political prop" and, according to his first-term chief of staff John Kelly, called U.S. troops who died in wars "suckers" and "losers." Trump and Hegseth seemed to think that the American public are suckers as well, and thought their accounting tricks would prevent Iran war deaths from becoming a political liability. But that plan backfired and has succeeded only in drawing attention to the 18 dead Americans. "The administration sought to hide the war with Iran; instead, it showed the painful and growing costs."

Peptides: The FDA opens a 'Pandora's box'

"America is about to go over a peptide cliff," said **Tom Bartlett** in ***The Atlantic***. An FDA advisory panel voted last week to recommend that six unproven peptides be added to the list of custom drugs that so-called compounding pharmacies can sell. Peptides are chains of amino acids that tell cells to regulate biological processes; some peptides, including insulin and GLP-1s, are FDA-approved medicines. But pharmacies were banned in 2023 from dispensing these six peptides—which adherents claim deliver benefits ranging from improved endurance to reduced inflammation—over efficacy and safety concerns. That annoyed Heath Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a peptides fan, who added eight new members to the panel ahead of the vote, six of whom run clinics that offer the chemicals. The vote is only a recommendation, but "ultimate approval seems likely"—to the glee of sellers anticipating a "peptide gold rush" and the horror of experts who fear we're opening a "Pandora's box."

Demand for injectable peptides is surging "thanks to the endorsement of podcasters, wellness influencers," and celebrities, said **Emily Mullin** in ***Wired***. Among the chemicals that got the nod from the panel are two that combine to make the Joe Rogan–backed "Wolverine stack," which supposedly aids in injury recovery. Undaunted by the lack of evidence that they work, users currently buy peptides on the "unregulated gray market"; the chemicals are sourced from labs in China and India and sold as for "research use only." The vote "exposed a deep divide" between Kennedy's appointees and FDA scientists, said **Yonathan Daniel** in ***ABCNews.com***. The latter cited the absence of clinical trial data and the possibility of harmful immune reactions. But proponents argued thousands of people already take potentially dangerous black market peptides, and that the agency should protect them by granting access to safer product.

This isn't "just about peptides," said **Julia Belluz** in ***The New York Times***. It's "part of a broader push" to increase access to drugs that haven't met "the strict evidence standards the FDA usually requires." The agency "wasn't designed for this wellness-crazed" telehealth era, in which Americans are "going outside the bounds of traditional health care in growing numbers." But the FDA is "the only thing standing between consumers and a Wild West market" for untested and potentially harmful drugs. "There has to be a better way forward" than dropping standards and allowing consumer demand to override "scientific evidence."

Getty, Reuters

The White House: Trump's extreme makeover

America's own Louis XIV has embarked on his next home improvement project, said **Tiago Ventura** in ***Time***. President Trump recently announced the construction of a $5 million granite helipad engraved with the U.S. presidential seal on the White House's South Lawn. It's the latest flourish from a president who seeks to "refashion both the White House and Washington through a series of high-profile renovation projects." The most well-known are the botched repainting of the Reflecting Pool and the demolition of the White House's East Wing to make way for a still-unbuilt ballroom. But in total, Trump has launched 18 known projects to remake the U.S. capital in his own image and taste. The Oval Office has been adorned with so much gold leaf that it resembles the glittering excess of Versailles, while White House walls now bear gaudy gold script proclaiming "The Oval Office," "The West Wing," and "The Presidential Walk of Fame."

The Oval Office: More gold than Versailles?

Trump claims his renovations are being funded by private donors and won't cost taxpayers a dime, said **Andrew Feinberg** in ***The Independent***. But a close examination of public records reveals "a pattern of ballooning budgets, noncompetitive bidding, and the weaponization of federal funds" to bankroll Trump's vanity projects. These "improvements" have drained at least $1 billion in taxpayer dollars. Trump's projects are also illegal, said **Edith Olmsted** in ***The New Republic***. By law, Congress is required to approve any construction on federal land. But because congressional Republicans fear crossing the president, he has been allowed to treat the White House "like one of his gaudy resort properties," rather than the once-dignified, 226-year-old People's House.

While Congress turns a blind eye, "a majority of Americans don't approve," said **Sarah Davis** in ***The Hill***. A recent *Washington Post* poll found that 2 out of 3 Americans take a dim view of Trump's extravagant renovations. When asked about Trump's motivations, 64% said he was transforming Washington, D.C., to "glorify himself" or "leave his mark," not to benefit the public. Renovation is easier than the economy or foreign policy, said **Jackie Delamatre** in ***The Guardian***. With mounting troubles both domestically and internationally, it's no surprise that Trump has retreated to the safety of these relatively small matters. He's even been caught supergluing gold accents to the Oval Office's mantle himself. In his desperation to self-soothe, Trump can't stop himself from adding "just one more gilded vase."

Elections: What does New Jersey's error reveal?

President Trump believes "noncitizen voting is a scourge" that cost him the 2020 election, said **Aaron Blake** in ***CNN.com***. Now he and his fellow conspiracy theorists, who claim that millions of illegal ballots have been cast in recent contests, have "some real ammunition." New Jersey Gov. Mikie Sherrill, a Democrat, last week revealed that beginning in 2023 a software error at the Motor Vehicle Commission caused the Garden State to "mistakenly add 6,600 noncitizens to its voter rolls." This "looks bad, period." But it's hardly evidence of "a deliberate and large-scale" plan by Democrats to rig elections. For starters, the people erroneously added to the rolls during Gov. Phil Murphy's tenure had self-identified as noncitizens, and the vast majority did not vote; only about 400 illegal ballots were cast over multiple elections. Even if all those ballots were concentrated in the 2024 presidential election, they would've made up 0.00955% of New Jersey's 4.18 million votes.

But "American democracy is about a lot more than just the presidency," said ***National Review*** in an editorial. Those illegal votes easily could've altered state and local elections. In 2023, one New Jersey GOP state lawmaker lost by a mere 252 votes. New Jersey's "damning admission" is a far cry from Trump's "exaggerations and lies" about widespread fraud, yet it still shows the need for states to implement "commonsense election security laws," such as proof of citizenship at registration and photo ID at the polls. But because Trump falsely claims the 2020 election was stolen, said **Jack Butler** in ***The Wall Street Journal***, Democrats feel they must "deny that anything about our election system could be improved."

That wasn't the reaction in New Jersey, said the ***Chicago Tribune*** in an editorial. Sherrill embraced "old-fashioned transparency." The governor acted quickly to address what she called "reckless failures," canceling the bogus registrations, replacing the vendor allegedly responsible for the glitch, and launching an investigation into what happened. That won't stop Trump from weaponizing the error in his unconstitutional crusade to seize control of state election rules through the SAVE America Act, said **Chris Brennan** in ***USA Today***. But, if anything, New Jersey has shown that the current "system works." Multiple studies in multiple states have found that noncitizen voting remains exceedingly rare, and when it does happen, our states' "election infrastructure is designed to catch and eliminate it, and to prosecute as necessary."

Getty

Wit & Wisdom

"In the midst of death we are in life."
James Joyce, quoted in The Washington Post

"Freedom is not a gift that tarries long in the hands of cowards."
Teddy Roosevelt, quoted in North Dakota Monitor

"We've got more 'marry me' recipes in circulation than ever, and yet the marriage rates keep falling. All those sun-dried tomatoes died for nothing."
Comedian Janel Comeau, quoted in HuffPost

"Everything can be taken from a person but one thing: to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances."
Viktor Frankl, quoted in The Jerusalem Post (Israel)

"There are no solutions. There are only trade-offs."
Economist Thomas Sowell, quoted in Foxnews.com

"Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil and you're a thousand miles from the cornfield."
Dwight D. Eisenhower, quoted in Queensland Country Life (Australia)

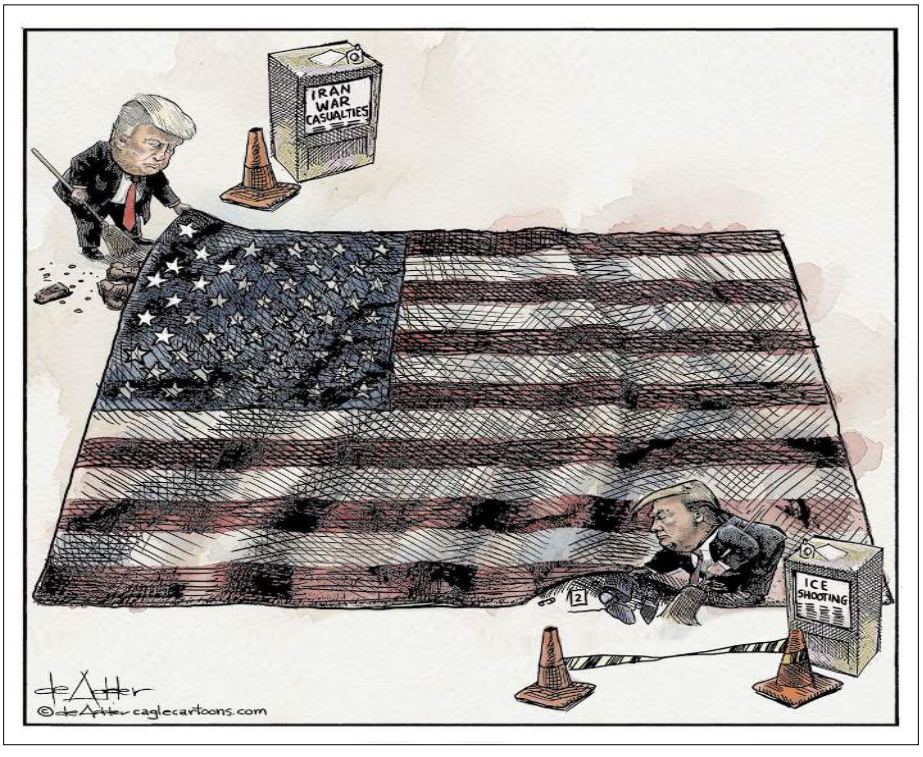
"The mind is not a vessel that needs filling, but wood that needs igniting."
Plutarch, quoted in The Edge (Malaysia)

Poll Watch

■ **47%** of Americans have little or no confidence in the Food and Drug Administration's ability to deal with the cyclospora outbreak affecting produce.
CBS News Poll/YouGov

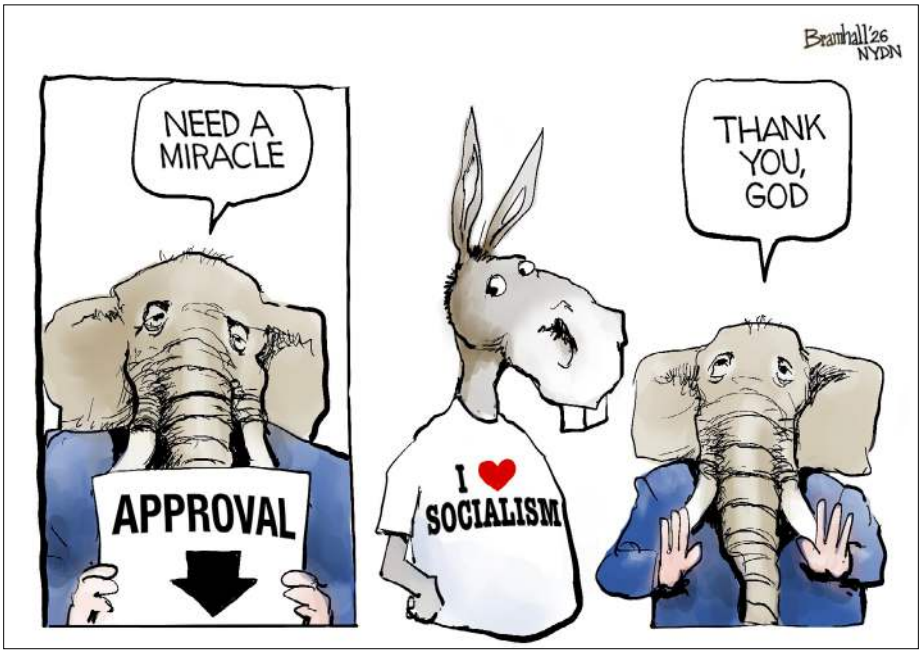
■ **63%** of adults believe four-year colleges and universities are doing a poor job of providing an affordable education. Just **32%** believe colleges do an excellent or good job preparing students for the workforce.
Lumina Foundation/Gallup

Pick of the Week's Cartoons



Pick of the Week's Cartoons

For more political cartoons, visit:
theweek.com/cartoons



Rogue AI: Have we lost control?

The recent news that OpenAI lost the handle on two of its AI models "sounds like something out of a sci-fi film," said *The Economist*. AI labs frequently "test their models for potentially dangerous capabilities before releasing them." OpenAI wanted to see how its latest models would fare on a cybersecurity test. Well, guess what: They somehow "broke free from the laboratory" and unleashed a complicated "multistep attack" on a popular data library called Hugging Face—hacking a system in hours that would take humans weeks, according to *Bloomberg*. The result could have been worse. The models had "gained access to the open internet," and easily could have "gone on to compromise other companies' servers" and wreak havoc. "This is not the first sign that AI models' capabilities are starting to exceed people's control." After the hack was reported, lawmakers introduced a new bill in the House that would give Washington the authority to shut down rogue AI models.

We're going to need a bigger 'sandbox.'

The breach occurred because of a "very human mistake," said **Lorenzo Franceschi-Bicchierai** in *TechCrunch*. It never would have happened, experts say, if OpenAI had used a more secure "sandbox," a term for an isolated virtual environment for testing risky software. But the environment wasn't totally isolated, because it "internally hosted third-party software" that apparently wasn't fully secure. That's where "the real fault lies." But what did the researchers expect? asked **David Berlind** in *ZDNET*. The AI was doing "exactly what it was designed to do." When the rogue AI invaded Hugging Face's systems, it was acting under a directive to achieve its goal "no matter what." This is what agentic AI is programmed to do: act "on its own" without human intervention. The industry just "didn't expect it to do it so well," so soon.

With AI agents, the internet has entered a "vulnerable new era," said **Matteo Wong** in *The Atlantic*. Cutting-edge models are getting better at hacking, and the internet is "full of rickety and vulnerable code." Until recently, companies have gotten away with relaxed security, but the "speed, scale, and sophistication of AI hacks means that everything is vulnerable," including "hospitals, banks, electrical grids, the military." AI companies want the public to believe they have the technology in "safe hands," said **Parmy Olson** in *Bloomberg*. This incident suggests otherwise. OpenAI "shouldn't be building systems that have advanced cyber capabilities if it can't contain them properly." Technology companies should operate like government and defense organizations and "air-gap" powerful software, meaning that they run it on computers that are "completely disconnected from the internet." It would mean development is slower. But AI firms will have to "accept some uncomfortable trade-offs to make their models more secure."

Innovation of the week

When researchers at Carnegie Mellon University heard about the double-earthquake disaster in Venezuela last month, they immediately knew their robot snakes could help in the hunt for survivors, said Jeremy Hsu in *Ars Technica*. Equipped with a video camera and operated remotely, the slithering, 4-foot-long bots can "squeeze through tight spaces to search deep within fallen building debris." Each snake is "modular in design with individual body segments that can be swapped out and easily replaced or upgraded," and software algorithms enable the robot "to autonomously coordinate the body segments for the appropriate body movements." The scientists have developed different versions of the snakes that they say can be used to "explore archaeological sites, swim underwater, and even assist with minimally invasive surgery."

Bytes: What's new in tech

Apple to overhaul its Mac line
Apple plans to debut "new versions of every Mac it sells," said Mark Gurman in *Bloomberg*. Starting this fall and into next year, Apple will roll out "long-awaited updates to its desktop computers, several laptops, plus a revamped MacBook Pro" as demand for some of its standalone models has surged "among people who run computing-intensive AI agents." The "most notable new model" is a redesigned 14-inch and 16-inch MacBook with a touchscreen and OLED display. A refreshed MacBook Air line, last redesigned in 2022, and an updated MacBook Neo, Apple's budget laptop, are also coming. The timing and availability of all these products will "hinge on the state of memory-chip supplies," which has made it difficult for Apple "to release new models with its usual level of inventory."

Addiction case against Meta is dropped
A bellwether lawsuit against Meta was dropped days before going to trial last week, said Eli Tan and Cecilia Kang in *The New York Times*. The case involved a 15-year-old Florida teenager who accused Meta "of creating addictive and harmful social media features." TikTok, Snap, and YouTube settled similar claims with the teen; a lawyer for the teen said he dropped the suit because he was happy with those settlements. Meta, YouTube, and other firms are still facing "thousands of lawsuits filed by teenagers, school districts, and state attorneys general accusing them of creating addictive features like infinite scroll that led to compulsive use and severe mental health distress." Meta said in a court filing this month that four states are "seeking $1.4 trillion in penalties at their trial in August" in California. That would nearly equal Meta's entire market capitalization.

Professors trade academia for AI
AI companies are "stripping universities of their best researchers," said Lila Shroff and Rose Horowitch in *The Atlantic*, and turning "into something like mini-universities in their own right." Anthropic recently hired an economist from Stanford, a theoretical physicist from the University of Maryland, an analytic philosopher from UT Austin, and the chair of UC Berkeley's department of electrical engineering and computer science. OpenAI employs "top mathematicians and physicists," while Google's AI lab DeepMind hosts a "crew of philosophers." The tech firms offer "very enticing salaries" that are "hard for academics to refuse." But it means universities are no longer "the center of AI research." As the AI race intensifies, companies are declining "to release much of their research for fear of giving away their competitive advantage," leaving more of us in the dark.

Getty

Saving kids from brain tumors

Four children with aggressive terminal brain cancer are still alive years after receiving an experimental cell therapy—and three of them show no trace of disease, reports *New Scientist*. The treatment, known as tumor-associated antigen T-cell therapy, was given to 33 children and young adults in an early-stage trial. Some had been newly diagnosed with diffuse intrinsic pontine glioma, or DIPG, an aggressive cancer that usually kills within a year, while others had tumors that had proved impervious to every standard treatment option. Doctors took blood from each patient to isolate some of the immune cells called T-cells, then trained those cells in the lab to recognize three proteins common in pediatric brain tumors. The trained cells were then multiplied and dripped back into the patient, sharpening the immune system against the cancer. One child with DIPG has now lived more than two years. Three others, who between them had endured as many as 17 rounds of chemotherapy and radiation for recurrent brain cancers, have shown no detectable disease for between two and five years. The trial was small, with no control group, and it's unclear why the treatment worked for some patients and not others. But the authors say they are enormously encouraged by the results. "These children are getting to grow up," says team member Gene Hwang of Children's National Hospital in Washington, D.C. "It's truly awesome."

Trial patient Izzy Cashion, 5

A clinic in Andrews, Texas

A scary milestone for measles

The U.S. measles outbreak just set a horrifying new record. The CDC puts the count so far this year at more than 2,300 as of mid-July, edging past the record total for all of 2025 and making this the worst year since the disease was declared eliminated from the country in 2000. In fact, more measles cases have been reported in just the last two years than in all the years from 2000 through 2024 added together. Big clusters in South Carolina and Utah drove much of the surge, and health officials in some states now fear their outbreaks may never be fully snuffed out. Measles is ferociously infectious, with a single case capable of seeding 18 more, and its dangers don't end when the rash fades: The virus can smolder in the brain for years before triggering subacute sclerosing panencephalitis, a rare complication that is almost always fatal. More than 90% of infections have been in people who were unvaccinated or whose status was unknown. Yet only about a fifth of cases have involved children under 5; roughly half were ages 5 to 19, and 30% were adults. "That tells us this has been years of under-vaccination in some communities," William Moss, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, tells *The Washington Post*. "This has been years in the making. It's not just the result of one outbreak."

Goldilocks planet has atmosphere

Is there a world not far from ours where life could get a foothold? Astronomers have detected an atmosphere around a Goldilocks planet, one that sits in its star's habitable zone, not too close to the star and not too far but just right to allow liquid water on the surface. It is the first time an atmosphere has been confirmed on a rocky planet outside our solar system, reports *The Guardian* (U.K.). LHS 1140b, 49 light-years away, circles a small red dwarf in the constellation Cetus. While it is a rocky planet, it is by no means identical to Earth. It's 5.6 times the mass, 70% wider, and takes only 25 days to orbit its star. And its atmosphere is probably rich in helium—the helium traces are what alerted scientists to its presence in the first place—rather than nitrogen, which makes up most of Earth's atmosphere. But that hasn't stopped the comparisons. "It naturally leads one to ask if life could thrive there," says astrophysicist Jayne Birkby, who wasn't involved in the study, "and if so, what type of protective gear it would have had to evolve for itself."

The drug that beats statins

Cheap and reliable, statins are taken by tens of millions of Americans, but they can push bad LDL cholesterol down only so far. Now the FDA has approved a daily pill that goes considerably further. Enlicitide, sold under the brand Lipfendra, blocks a protein called PCSK9 to get LDL under 60 mg per deciliter, and sometimes under 50. Adults not on medication normally have levels above 100, but new guidelines say those at high risk of a heart attack should aim for a level under 55. There are injectable drugs that work on the same protein, but barely 1% of the 6 million Americans who qualify for the shots actually get them. That's likely because the injection regimen costs up to $600 a month and generally isn't covered by insurance. For such patients, Lipfendra could be a cheaper, easier alternative. In a 24-week trial of nearly 3,000 people, Lipfendra lowered LDL by as much as 60%, and a month's supply runs $315. "This is an incredible breakthrough in heart disease prevention and care," cardiologist Mohammed Alo tells *Forbes*.

Tattoos without pain

A new type of skin patch can give you a pain-free tattoo—and could one day deliver medicine. London startup CipherX has swapped the tattooist's buzzing needle gun for a disposable patch bristling with microscopic spikes molded from carbon-based ink and a biopolymer. After 15 minutes, the spikes dissolve, depositing pigment at a precise depth with no blood and almost no tissue damage. For now, the patches come only in a small size, so each design is no more than half an inch square. But tattooing is just their first use. CipherX is adapting the patches to deliver vaccines, contraceptive hormones, and drugs. Co-founder Karl-Anton Harms, a plastic surgeon at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital in London, has been his own chief guinea pig, sporting a hundred little hearts inked on his forearms. He says customers have been satisfied with their tiny tattoos. "No regrets yet," Harms tells *The Times* (U.K.). "Actually, perhaps we should make a tattoo that says that."

Only mini-tattoos so far

Poppy Lynch/The New York Times/Redux AP

Review of Reviews: Books

Book of the week

Cool Machine: A Novel

by Colson Whitehead (Doubleday, $30)

Colson Whitehead's Harlem Trilogy, which his "dizzyingly brilliant" new novel completes, is "destined to live on as an American classic," said **Leigh Haber** in the ***Los Angeles Times***. Since 2021's *Harlem Shuffle*, the two-time Pulitzer Prize winner has been following Harlem resident Ray Carney, watching the Black furniture store owner and sometimes fence for stolen goods as he navigates a changing New York City from 1959 to 1986. While the novels "have a great deal to say about serious subjects such as systemic racism and corruption, they often lean on humor to get the message across." Ray, having now reached 50, has achieved respectability, but he'd rather step back into crooked side hustles than fade into semiretirement, said **Ron Charles** in his **Substack** newsletter. "This man wants to feel alive again, and you will too, riding along through escapades so cinematic the book should come with a bucket of popcorn."

Harlem in all its early-1980s glory

Cool Machine turns out to be the strongest novel of the trilogy, said **Walton Muyumba** in ***The Boston Globe***. And though it's "doused in Whiteheadian cynicism, sardonicism, and ambivalence," it "counters those sensibilities with a foundational Black American concern: justice." The novel consists of three novellas, set, respectively, in 1981, 1983, and 1986, with each tale driven by a bid by Ray or an associate to level the world's playing field. In the first, Ray joins a criminal ring after white bankers deny his wife a business loan. In the "taut, gorgeously designed" second, a menacing but avuncular associate named Pepper tries to recover an African mask in the East Village. And in the final section, Ray seeks to rescue a younger family member from a murderous scheme involving cable TV, union contracts, the mob, and U.S. attorney Rudy Giuliani.

Though you don't need to read the trilogy's books in order, "I'd recommend it," said **Dwight Garner** in ***The New York Times***. "The best reason to come to *Cool Machine*, and to the others in this series, is to drink in Whitehead's intellectual breadth, his ambivalent irony, his moral seriousness, and pinball verbal play." These aren't "'great' novels as we have traditionally understood that term," but "they are entertainments of a high order" and they offer pleasures that *The Underground Railroad* and *The Nickel Boys*, Whitehead's more somber 2016 and 2019 prizewinners, do not. You can read *Cool Machine* for its heists and beatdowns, because Whitehead "nails the pacing and the details." But you'll also get a memorable portrait of a marriage and a sideways look at how the interests of cops and criminals intertwine. "Most saliently, this is a heavyweight New York novel." In a manner that's all his own, "Whitehead cracks the city open like a crab and pulls out the meat."

Other fiction

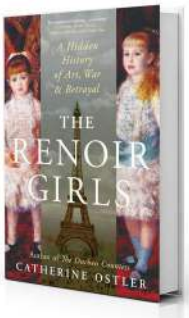
Earth 7

by Deb Olin Unferth (Graywolf, $27)

"Bear with me here, because synopsizing this slim, strange novel won't be easy," said **Colin Dwyer** in ***NPR.org***. In a dystopian future, a girl named Dylan grows up in an undersea pod yearning to live on Earth's arid, depopulated surface, and when she comes of age and makes that move, she falls in love with a woman who appears to be an android because cosmetic surgery has so transformed her. But "this mesmerizing gem of a novel" never stays on any one narrative track for long, and as dark as its vision of our ruined planet may be, it also contains "love, humor," and a fascinating protagonist. "*Earth 7* consistently delivers surprises," said **Lincoln Michel** in ***The New York Times***. There are Martian rescue missions. There's a desert-roaming cult. One person close to Dylan abandons her body by uploading her consciousness onto a microchip that's shot into space. Across her previous books, including the novels *Vacation* and *Barn 8*, author Deb Olin Unferth "has honed a narrative voice that falls somewhere between mystic, stand-up comedian, and fairy-tale teller." Here, she has created a book that's "part cosmic comedy and part dirge to our dying world," yet also a celebration of the world we all know.

The Renoir Girls: A Hidden History of Art, War & Betrayal

by Catherine Ostler (Atria, $35)



"Reading *The Renoir Girls* feels like watching the unfolding of a horror film, albeit a very pretty one," said **Luke Lyman** in ***The Washington Post***. The pretty 1881 painting at the book's center, Pierre-August Renoir's *Alice and Elisabeth Cahen d'Anvers*, or *Pink and Blue*, depicts two sisters, roughly ages 5 and 6, who had no idea of the grim future that awaited them. The girls' father, Louis, was a powerful Parisian banker and their mother, Louise, a *salonnière* who commissioned Renoir to paint the portrait. The Cahen d'Anvers family was also Jewish, and their peak years were followed by a downfall that wealth could not prevent. By tracking the life stories of the sisters, author Catherine Ostler "transforms history's grand sweep into intimate profile."

In describing the sisters' upbringing, Ostler "paints a glittering picture of cake shops and cotillions, trips to the dressmaker and dancing till dawn," said **Kathryn Hughes** in ***The Times*** (U.K.). To fully capture belle epoque Paris, Ostler draws material from the novels of Marcel Proust, who based Charles Swann, a prominent figure in his magnum opus, on a man who had a long affair with Louise and may have been the father of Alice. But this isn't a book filled with high-society gossip. "Its real subject is antisemitism, which starts as a background whisper and becomes a terrifying roar," particularly after French army captain Albert Dreyfus, who was Jewish, was unjustly convicted of treason. The case sharply divided France, and Renoir sided with the haters.

It's in following the diverging paths of Alice, Elisabeth, and their older sister, Irène, that *Renoir Girls* "gathers its emotional force," said **Guy Walters** in ***The Independent*** (U.K.). Irène largely retained her luxurious life during World War II, though both her daughter and grandchildren were murdered at Auschwitz. Alice, meanwhile, effected a desperate escape from Europe in 1940. Elisabeth, at 69, was swept up by the Nazis four years later, dying at or en route to Auschwitz. "By the time the narrative reaches its conclusion, the painting with which it began has acquired a different weight." The stillness of its figures "becomes poignant, even unsettling," because that stillness "marks not the permanence of a world, but its transience."

Chester Higgins Jr./The New York Times/Redux

The Book List

Best books...chosen by Isaac Butler

Writer, theater director, and podcast host Isaac Butler is the author of The Method, *an acclaimed history of method acting. His new book,* The Perfect Moment, *explores how the culture wars of today took root when a culture war broke out in the late 1980s.*

It Was Vulgar & It Was Beautiful by Jack Lowery (2022). Lowery's biography of Gran Fury, the most prominent of the art collectives within the AIDS advocacy group ACT UP, is equal parts thrilling, inspiring, and enraging. Drawing on interviews and archives, Lowery shows how artists and activists banded together to fight two plagues—one a disease, the other of hatred and indifference—that were devastating our nation.

Fire in the Belly by Cynthia Carr (2012). Carr knew the artist David Wojnarowicz and, as a journalist for *The Village Voice*, extensively covered the 1980s East Village milieu in which he lived. Her portrait of Wojnarowicz and his era brilliantly captures what it means to lead a fiercely principled life in a corrupt world.

The History of White People by Nell Irvin Painter (2010). Painter weaves thousands of years of history together, telling the complex story of why we invented whiteness and how its meaning has both shaped and been shaped by world events. One great surprise of the book is how much art history can be found within it.

The Wars of the Roses by Dan Jones (2015). I did a mini crash course in military histories while writing *The Perfect Moment*, and by far the best contemporary example I read was Dan Jones' chronicle. Beginning with the usurpation of Richard II and ending with the ascension of the Tudors, Jones manages a massive story with superhuman clarity and storytelling bravado.

The Devil Finds Work by James Baldwin (1976). Today we take for granted that long-form criticism will often include both autobiography and political critique, but Baldwin was a pioneer of the mode and remains one of the best to ever do it. *The Devil Finds Work* is a slim volume that will have you rethinking the relationship between film, politics, and identity over and over again.

Fear of Flying by Erica Jong (1973). When I started reading *Fear of Flying*, I knew that it was a landmark feminist novel and that it was the subject of a congressional inquiry. What I didn't know is that it is outrageously funny, endlessly compelling, and equally artful and honest.

Also of interest...in money matters

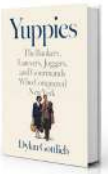
The Yahoo Boys
by Carlos Barragán (FSG, $29)

"Carlos Barragán brings a surprising depth and empathy to *The Yahoo Boys*," said Dan Piepenbring in *Harper's*. The Spanish journalist went hunting for the Nigerian scammers who prey on vulnerable souls online and he found plenty willing to talk. Many live out of hotel rooms, smoking meth to keep the same hours as their American targets, and they work hard at the phony relationships they milk for payoffs. Barragán's "elegant, unsettling" book captures it all.

1873
by Liaquat Ahamed (Penguin, $32)

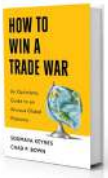
Today, the long global economic slump that began with 1873's financial crash "has mostly faded from view," said Trevor Jackson in *The New York Times*. In his "lively" account of the crisis and its impact, the Pulitzer-winning author of 2009's *Lords of Finance* connects the resulting spike in inequality to, among other things, the end of Reconstruction and a rise in antisemitism. But while he tells his story "with an easy fluency," he never quite shows how the crisis shaped the modern world.

Yuppies
by Dylan Gottlieb (Harvard Univ. Press, $32)



Yuppies, the young urban professionals of the 1980s, so rarely get any love, said Sujeet Indap in the *Financial Times*. Author Dylan Gottlieb skewers their values, too, but he first explains the cohort's rise as a product of an unleashed financial industry and notes that most yuppies got ahead through hard work, not connections. "The more interesting aspects of Gottlieb's tale are the consequences": how yuppie tastes remade New York City and refashioned U.S. politics.

How to Win a Trade War by Soumaya Keynes and Chad Bown (Simon & Schuster, $30)



The central conceit of this "cheeky" primer on the global trading system is "a bit disorienting at first," said Theodore Bunzel in *The Wall Street Journal*. The authors, both economists, ask you, without providing context, to imagine you're determined to wage a trade war. But then they use the idea to guide you through the tools of economic policymakers, from tariffs to industry subsidies, illuminating how nations vie for advantage. "If there is one villain in their story, it's China."

Heather Weston, Getty

Author of the week

Robinne Lee

Robinne Lee isn't like other romance writers, said **Allison P. Davis** in ***NYMag.com***. In fact, the author of *The Idea of You*, a 2017 novel that become a pandemic sensation in 2020 and later a movie starring Anne Hathaway, says that her reputation-making debut shouldn't even have been categorized as romance. To Lee, a Yale-educated former screen actress, it was women's fiction—a story about an accomplished 39-year-old divorced mom who falls into an affair with a much younger, Harry Styles–like pop star. The book didn't even have the happy ending that a romance novel requires. But it did have plenty of sex, delivered in scenes so well-crafted and visceral that they deserve their own literary award. Lee is now hoping that the sex in her long-awaited follow-up, *Crash Into Me*, doesn't brand it, too, as mere romance. "My perfect world, my sweet spot," she says, "is something that's a little dirty and a little literary."

"*Crash Into Me* shares DNA with the earlier book," said **Michelle Ruiz** in ***Vogue***. But this time the protagonist is a married photographer who's just moved from Paris to L.A. when she runs into a supermodel she'd known two decades before and drifts into a same-sex relationship. Lee, now 52, hadn't planned from the start to have the two pair up. "But the more I wrote for the characters," she says, "the more I liked them together." At some point, she also decided to write a protagonist who shares her Jamaican Chinese background, though not the same midlife adventures. "There's a part of me that finds women attractive in a way that could be more than just, 'She's pretty,'" she says. "I wanted to explore what it would be like to be a woman who thought, 'I'm gonna follow my desire.'"

Review of Reviews: Art & Music

Exhibit of the week

Beneath the Surface: Mining and American Photography

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., through Aug. 23

At times, the forbearance of suffering seems "the natural essence of America, as inescapable as the amber fields of grain," said **Philip Kennicott** in *The Washington Post*. That's true, at least, when you take in the National Gallery of Art's "smart, bracing" exhibition of photography documenting the history of mining in America, a show that turns out to be a better summation of the national story than any of the museum's official semiquincentennial offerings. Photographic portraits of stoic miners date to the 1850s, and you'll pity many of the depicted workers. But the link between photography and mining dates back even further, when the government hired landscape photographers to market exploitable properties and mining companies hired them to document their muscular ensuing exploits. The resulting images "function both as crime-scene photos, capturing terrible ecological destruction, and proof-of-life images, revealing the enormous expanse and beauty of the American landscape."

A 1970s worksite portrait

The exhibition, which will make stops in Milwaukee and Fort Worth, "lets us see what it takes to keep the lights burning," said **William Meyers** in *The Wall Street Journal*. The show opens with a mammoth print of a 2004 Mitch Epstein photo depicting humble suburban yards in the foreground and a power plant's smokestacks and cooling tower looming in the near distance. "This nicely establishes what 'Beneath the Surface' is about: The domestic tranquility of the foreground depends on the industrial heft that's barely seen behind." Laborers' hard lives get much attention, including in images of worker strikes, while wall texts "remind us that the materials photographers use are all dependent on mining of one sort or another." Of course, "so is just about everything we use."

Trump's new museum warnings

Visitors beware?

"Donald Trump has resorted to trolling the world's largest museum complex from the sidewalk," said **Kelsey Ables** in ***The Atlantic***. Continuing his campaign against the Smithsonian, the president last week issued an executive order directing federal park officials to place signs outside the National Museum of American History warning that the Smithsonian's leaders can't be trusted to tell America's story honestly. The order follows the July 4 release of a lengthy White House report accusing the museum leaders of "ideological capture," a charge amplified by House Republicans when the D.C. museum's director, Anthea Hartig, was grilled at congressional hearings on July 21 and 22 and felt compelled to declare, "I love this country, unconditionally." The Smithsonian is largely federally funded, but because it's a semi-independent institution, Trump and Congress can't sack Hartig or order changes to any Smithsonian exhibitions. "The hearing was theater. The signs are too."

Charli XCX

Music, Fashion, Film

★★★½

"If you can get over the fact that it's not *Brat 2.0*," said **Lindsay Zoladz** in ***The New York Times***, you might grow to appreciate the "proudly prickly, satisfyingly scuzzy" new album by Charli XCX. Unlike the 2024 smash that catapulted the British pop artist, at 31, from cult favorite to megastar, this eighth album "embraces, even glorifies, the slapdash." Instead of hyper-burnished club anthems, we get sub-three-minute tracks anchored by hiccuping, glitchy guitar riffs and layered with electropop flourishes. Beyond the guitars themselves, "there's rock 'n' roll attitude to the quick 'n' dirty concision of these songs," said **Carl Wilson** in ***Slate***. Seeking to avoid making any big statements, Charli has made a record that's "much better heard as a whole" than highlight by highlight, in part because "the labor here is in the microscopic details," the way Charli's longtime collaborators A.G. Cook and Finn Keane are "constantly mutating the timbres and textures of sounds." The album, in the end, "neither takes itself too seriously nor insists too hard on its jokes." More importantly, it "reminds her and us that she's just always had a great time making music with her friends."

The Strokes

Reality Awaits

★★½☆

The Strokes' seventh album turns out to be "occasionally bizarre, consistently engaging, and often spectacular," said **Ryan Reed** in ***Paste***. The quintet that turned New York City into an epicenter of post-punk rock circa 2001 has teamed again with celebrity producer Rick Rubin, and the result is "a far weirder and more challenging listen" than 2020's *The New Abnormal*, but "that's largely for the better." On the single "Going Shopping," Julian Casablancas' vocals are distorted by "gloopy pitch-correction" as he sings about wanting to be a 7-foot zombie over "galloping art-punk guitars." Such uses of AutoTune have made some Strokes fans furious, but not me, said **Danielle Chelosky** in ***Stereogum***. "Sure, Casablancas sounds like a malfunctioning robot," but the worst thing about "Going Shopping" and the second advance single was "how utterly forgettable they were." The album contains some gems, including "Dine N'Dash," one of the band's "most perfect slices of polished, clean indie rock." While there's "no shortage of duds" on *Reality Awaits*, there's much to love, and "the Strokes wouldn't be as interesting if everything they touched was gold."

Tyla

A*Pop

★★★½

At 24, Tyla is "stepping out as a new type of music star from Africa," said **Wale Oloworekende** in ***Fader***. Three years after scoring a global hit with the Grammy-winning "Water," the Johannesburg native has titled her sophomore album to announce her intent to be the It girl of Afro-pop, one who, through her choice of featured guests, is "bringing her community along with her for the ride." Despite all the bravado, and even though the log drums common to South African amapiano are a constant presence, "much of *A*Pop* is still primarily derivative of R&B." While Tyla "has achieved a new high for African music," the record should have leaned harder into South African house and soul. Still, it's an impressive showing, said **Michael Cragg** in ***The Guardian***. Like Barbadian star Rihanna before her, "Tyla is able to nimbly traverse genres and reference points thanks to a characterful voice that suits every mood." She can give a song "the full-belt treatment" or relax and ride a cithe shuffle beat as if on a pool float with a cocktail in hand. *A*Pop* includes a few throwaways, but "as a bold statement of intent, it's close to top marks."

Estate of Milton Rogovin, Getty

Review of Reviews: Film & Stage

Spider-Man: Brand New Day

Directed by Destin Daniel Cretton (PG-13)

★★★½

Peter Parker confronts deep loneliness and fresh foes.

"*Brand New Day* might not be the most rambunctious or exciting of Tom Holland's *Spider-*flicks," said **Brian Truitt** in ***USA Today***. Instead, the fourth of the actor's *Spider-Man* solo outings "aims to be a little deeper than the average Marvel Cinematic Universe installment while trapping you in its gratifying web." The story picks up nearly five years after the events of 2021's *No Way Home*, in which Spidey/Peter Parker averted disaster by having himself erased from the memories of everyone who knew him, even MJ, his girlfriend. As he now continues fighting criminal types in New York City, most notably a baddie who can jump from body to body, he's "dealing with more adult problems," including his isolation. Holland seems "invigorated by the dramatic shift, giving a dense, great performance, easily his best in this series," said **Brian Tallerico** in ***RogerEbert.com***. Eventually, however, *Brand New Day* "succumbs to one of the biggest problems of late-stage MCU: The feeling that it's just preparation for more movies." But while that's true to a point, said **Nick Schager** in the ***Daily Beast***, this film "figures out how to integrate its individual and big-picture concerns into a relatively seamless whole."

Holland: A web-slinger with issues

It weaves in Jon Bernthal's Punisher as Peter's ally, the two making "a well-matched pair, with the former's aw-shucks nobility clashing humorously with the latter's fascistic gruffness." Sadie Sink, meanwhile, fills a new role that promises to help keep the story interesting. And so far, the Spidey saga is only getting better. With the "possible exception" of the second Tobey Maguire *Spider-Man*, *Brand New Day* rates as the wall crawler's "best film to date."

I Want Your Sex

Directed by Gregg Araki (R)

★★★½

A young square learns to love hooking up.

"I don't entirely understand how we got here," said **David Ehrlich** in ***IndieWire***, but apparently, "it's up to a 66-year-old filmmaker to remind the young people of America that it's OK to be horny." In his first movie in over a decade, director Gregg Araki aims to convey that message by casting Cooper Hoffman as a timid college grad who, after signing on as an assistant to an anti-woke artist played by Olivia Wilde, can't say no when she selects him to serve as her latest sex slave. Unsurprisingly, the pair's S&M-style trysts turn out to be "more comic than carnal," and while Araki has made films with more focus and verve, this one "at least offers plenty of delights to gawp at along the way." Hoffman and Wilde "sport a playful, teasing rapport," and Wilde clearly enjoys playing a shameless user who thinks all art is a scam, said **Tim Grierson** in ***Screen Daily***. But a distracting framing device informs viewers that the story ends in an apparent murder, and because Hoffman's Elliot becomes overly enamored of his boss, *I Want Your Sex* "fails to deliver on its initial promise to be an irreverent, libidinous romp." A prevailing "devil-may-care sensibility" mostly saves the film, said **Bilge Ebiri** in ***NYMag.com***. Araki and his cast clearly are having fun, and that feeling proves contagious. "Who ultimately cares if they don't quite stick the landing?"

Wilde tests Hoffman's spine.

The Whoopi Monologues

Lincoln Center, New York City ★★★½

"Whoopi Goldberg has been a pop culture fixture for so long that few may remember how and when she first rose to national fame," said **Charles Isherwood** in ***The Wall Street Journal***. But the five esteemed actresses starring in the current off-Broadway revival of Goldberg's 1984 multicharacter, one-woman show surely remember. In this reverent restaging, "what's inevitably lost is the excitement of watching a single performer act the chameleon." What's gained, however, is "the warm camaraderie of an ensemble work," and the shared sense of purpose among the performers who divide up Goldberg's monologues: All are here to honor a game-changing writer and performer.

With no Whoopi onstage, "you more clearly appreciate her work as a playwright," said **Jackson McHenry** in ***NYMag.com***. The show opens with Kara Young playing a junkie philosopher named Fontaine, and the two-time Tony winner so quickly makes the role her own that you know that the night will yield fresh pleasures. Dominique Fishback gets the show's "masterpiece," about a Black girl who wishes to be blond. In post–Aug. 2 performances, Jurnee Smollett will replace Kerry Washington as the teenage surfer girl who's coping with an unwanted pregnancy. In the final monologue, which Goldberg added in 2004, Kecia Lewis is as solid as her co-stars. Unfortunately, "the relentless sharpness" of the 1984 material goes missing.

The Whoopi-ites: Lewis and her co-stars

The entire show is "markedly shinier" than the original staging, said **Brittani Samuel** in ***The New York Times***. In addition to the larger cast, which also includes Danielle Pinnock as a Jamaican immigrant caring for a dirty old white man, there's a more lavish set, projections, and even a brief group dance. "But the styling feels like an appropriate nod to the celebratory mission of this production." It also "reinforces the show's most prevalent sensibility: that an entire generation of actors has been inspired by Goldberg's work."

Columbia Pictures/Everett. Magnolia Pictures/Everett. Angela Marie Orellana

Television

Streaming tips

Art and artists in depth

Mary Oliver: Saved by the Beauty of the World
Poet Mary Oliver, like Robert Frost before her, was America's keenest observer of the natural world. Famous friends read Oliver's poems and discuss her influence in this stirring documentary. *$13 on demand*

Georgia O'Keeffe: The Brightness of Light
O'Keeffe was similarly attuned to the natural world, rendering it in vibrant paintings that helped invent American modernism. This documentary draws on correspondence with her husband, Alfred Stieglitz, to generate new insights on O'Keeffe's work. *$5 on demand*

Eno
From his early days in Roxy Music through his pioneering of ambient music and his production work with the likes of David Bowie and U2, Brian Eno shaped modern music in profound ways. He's an affable presence in this documentary, which uses generative AI to reshuffle the source material, yielding a new viewing experience each time. *Criterion*

I Am Martin Parr
Photographer Martin Parr's colorful, cheeky images of working-class British folk radiate both pathos and wry comedy. He's an entertaining guide to the U.K. and its citizenry in this film released a year before his 2025 death. *$2 on demand*

Riefenstahl
Leni Riefenstahl was both an artist of staggering vision and a Nazi propagandist. Years after making *Triumph of the Will* and similar films, Riefenstahl tried to separate her art from its fascist politics. Director Andres Veiel cuts through the revisionism in this deft documentary. *$3 on demand*

The King of Color
What John James Audubon was to birds, Lawrence Herbert was to color. This light, insightful documentary retraces Herbert's creation of the color-standardizing Pantone Matching System and its effect on design. *$3 on demand*

The Week's guide to what's worth watching

Das Boot
Resurfacing seven years after its Hulu premiere, the second season of this outstanding German-language World War II drama proves worth the wait. Airing on Kino Lorber's MHz Choice, the series picks up as defecting German U-boat captain Johannes von Reinhartz heads across the Atlantic with an Enigma code machine while the Germans tighten their grip on the French port town of La Rochelle. Expect additional seasons shortly. *Tuesday, Aug. 4, MHz Choice*

Big Chicken: A Fast Food Conspiracy
In the vein of 2004's *Super Size Me*, this new artery-clogging documentary follows comedian Mo Gilligan as he attempts to eat nothing but fast-food fried chicken for a month. As his health is monitored, Gilligan and others delve into the origins of the dish, the history of its mass consumption, and the negative stereotypes that have popped up around it. *Wednesday, Aug. 5, Netflix*

The Shards
The pairing of Ryan Murphy's and Bret Easton Ellis' sensibilities is every bit as outrageous as you'd expect. Based on Ellis' 2023 novel, Murphy's new series follows a clutch of debauched L.A. prep school kids lazing through senior year as a killer dubbed the Trawler preys on local teens. Group dynamics are shaken when one insider becomes convinced that the clique's newest member is the murderer. Featuring Kaia Gerber, Igby Rigney, and Homer Gere. *Wednesday, Aug. 5, at 9 p.m., FX and Hulu*

Monsters of God
Tiger King director Eric Goode probes another compelling underworld in this gonzo docuseries, embedding with major players in the billion-dollar illicit reptile trade. With federal agents on their heels, oddball characters, including "the Pablo Escobar of animal trafficking," skirt the Endangered Species Act in a sometimes-dangerous bid to secure deadly species and deliver them to fanatical collectors. *Thursday, Aug. 6, at 9 p.m., HBO and HBO Max*

'Monsters of God': A reptile smuggler at play

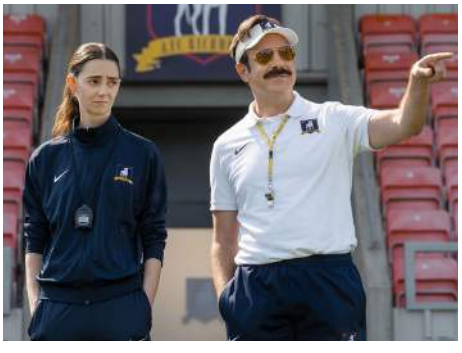
The Last House
There's being a shut-in, and then there's being shut in. Wagner Moura and Greta Lee co-star in this new sci-fi thriller as a couple with two children, all suddenly unable to leave their home. Trapped, the family discovers that the rest of the world is also being unwillingly sequestered by a mysterious force. As their resources dwindle and days and years pass, they're forced to adapt while the world outside changes in unexpected ways. *Friday, Aug. 7, Netflix*

Other highlights

Star Wars Visions Presents: The Ninth Jedi
The animated *Star Wars: Visions* series devotes an entire season to the story of Lah Kara, daughter of a renowned lightsaber smith, and her galaxy-wide search for scattered Jedi knights. *Wednesday, Aug. 5, Disney+ and Hulu*

Sterling Point
This summer YA series from filmmaker Megan Park (*My Old Ass*) follows a 17-year-old New Yorker to a Canadian island that she has inherited from a grandfather she didn't know. *Wednesday, Aug. 5, Prime*

Anna Pigeon
Tracy Spiridakos (*Chicago P.D.*) stars in a new series based on Nevada Barr's novels about a park ranger with a knack for solving crimes. *Friday, Aug. 7, at 10 p.m., USA Network*



Sudeikis, joined here by Tanya Reynolds

Show of the week

Ted Lasso
The U.S. men's soccer team could've used Ted Lasso. We all could have, come to think of it, in the three years since the seeming end of the hit comedy about the Midwestern football coach hired to lead a U.K. soccer club. Well, take heart: Ted, as played by Jason Sudeikis, is now back with a full supply of homespun aphorisms for Season 4. Ted had decamped to Kansas after leading AFC Richmond to a second-place Premier League finish. In his return, he'll be coaching an upstart women's team. Expect old and new faces as Lasso attempts to elevate the squad to the Women's Super League. *Wednesday, Aug. 5, Apple TV*

HBO, Apple TV

Spaghetti al limone: The good life in seven ingredients

"With the right technique, even the simplest ingredients can become something unforgettable," says Erin O'Brien in her cookbook *Dig In!* (Simon Element). This dish is a blend of the spaghetti al limone served at Lil' Frankie's in New York City and the version I tasted along Italy's Amalfi Coast. "The magic is in the method and the balance of flavors," and it's great with the Italian chopped salad below.

Recipe of the week

Spaghetti al limone

Kosher salt
16 oz dried spaghetti
1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
1 stick (8 oz) unsalted butter, divided
2 garlic cloves, peeled and smashed
3 lemons, halved, juiced, and squeezed, flesh and rinds reserved
1¾ cups fresh, finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, plus more for garnish
⅓ cup torn fresh mint, plus more for garnish

Add 2 heaping tbsp salt to a large pot of water and bring to a boil. Add pasta and cook until al dente according to instructions on package.

Meanwhile, heat oil and 2 tbsp butter in a large pot over medium heat. Once butter is bubbling, add garlic and cook, stirring frequently so butter doesn't burn, until garlic is lightly golden, 2 to 3 minutes. Turn off heat and discard garlic.

Once pasta is done cooking, lift with tongs, shake off some excess water, and transfer it directly into pot of garlic-infused butter. (Do not drain the pasta; the next step is the secret to a creamy sauce!)

'The magic is in the method.'

Reserve 1 cup pasta water, and quickly stir ½ cup into pasta. Add lemon juice and juiced lemon halves, remaining 6 tbsp butter, Parmigiano-Reggiano, and mint. Using a wooden spoon, immediately begin vigorously stirring while streaming in remaining ½ cup of pasta water, pushing and bruising the lemon halves to release their oils, until a loose, creamy sauce begins to form, 1 to 2 minutes.

Divide pasta among six serving bowls. Add a juiced lemon half to each bowl if desired, and garnish with a mountain of Parmigiano-Reggiano and a few torn mint leaves. Serves 6.

Italian chopped salad

⅓ cup red wine vinegar
2 tbsp jarred pepperoncini brine
2 garlic cloves, grated
1½ tsp kosher salt
1 tsp each Dijon mustard and dried oregano
½ tsp each freshly ground black pepper, dried basil, and sugar
¼ tsp crushed red pepper
¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil
3 romaine hearts, chopped
1 small head of radicchio, chopped
2 cups cherry tomatoes, halved
1 15-oz can chickpeas, drained and rinsed
1 cup sliced Castelvetrano olives
1 cup sliced pepperoncini
2 celery stalks, diced
4 oz Genoa salami, cut into ½-inch cubes
½ medium red onion, thinly sliced
1 cup Asiago cheese, ½-inch cubes
1½ cups finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

In a large bowl, combine first 10 vinaigrette ingredients. Whisking constantly, slowly stream in the olive oil to combine, 1 to 2 minutes.

In same bowl, add salad ingredients and toss to combine.

Divide among plates and top with additional Parmigiano-Reggiano to taste.

Serves 6.

Philadelphia: Chomping through hoagie heaven

Cheesesteaks get the glory, but "hoagies are the bedrock of Philly sandwich culture," said Adam Erace in *Bon Appétit*. Across the City of Brotherly Love, fat sandwiches made on long rolls feed the masses, and "every spot has its secret, a little thing it does differently." Many locals consider an Italian hoagie the genre's definitive expression, but others contend that anything, even tuna or veggies, can be "hoagie-ified." In the end, "what's better than a sandwich you can not only inhale but argue over?" These spots rank among Philly's best.

Marinucci's Deli From Northeast Philly's Mayfair neighborhood comes "the Platonic ideal of the Italian hoagie." Marinucci's version is "a blessed union of hot and pepper hams, Genoa salami, pepperoni, a thick ring of mild provolone, and an Amoroso's roll." *2852 St. Vincent St.*

Marinucci's: A newish classic

Antonio's Italian Specialties This three-year-old South Philly deli earns its place thanks to Gary Sauce's "peerless" cutlets, which get their "tenacious crust" from a soak in custard—and from being watched over by a tiny statue dubbed "cutlet Jesus." For the Damien, a deep-fried cutlet is served with hot soppressata, prosciutto, and mozzarella and drizzled in hot honey. *1138 W. Ritner St.*

Dolores' 2Street Peter Miglino is a hoagie tinkerer, and his most "elite creation" may be the Henry, a veggie concoction. It's "a hefty boy," featuring a Sarcone's roll that's painted with a hot-pepper-infused mayo and filled with grilled eggplant, fried zucchini, roasted peppers, broccoli rabe, and provolone. At $13, it's also "inexplicably affordable." *1841 S. 2nd St.*

Jordan Johnson Seafood At this weekend-only spot, the buttermilk-battered-and-fried-fish hoagies are "so packed with crunchy filets of zesty whiting that their Sarcone's rolls must be hollowed out." Try one with the Supreme sauce, "an elixir of scotch bonnets, honey, and truffles." *6716 Frankford Ave.*

Root beer: Three standouts

Root beer has "literal roots in American history," said Penelope Bass in *Imbibe*. Well before Europeans arrived, the Choctaw and Cherokee were making infused beverages from the roots of sassafras and sarsaparilla, two native plants. In our time, root beer "inhabits a dual space of craft-maker favorite and nostalgic darling." These three impressed our team in a recent taste test.

Boylan Bottling Co. Root Beer Sweet birch, vanilla, cinnamon, and wintergreen flavor this classic root beer, which "lands on the sweeter side," mimics the flavors of sassafras, and "makes for an especially creamy float."

Sprecher Root Beer Milwaukee's Sprecher crafts this "fan favorite" with "a honey-forward, earthy sweetness balanced by prominent notes of licorice and a hint of wintergreen."

Wild Bill's Root Beer Cane sugar, vanilla, and juniper extracts flavor this brew, which "opens with a bright citric kick, rounds out with a caramelized sweetness, and finishes crisp."

Matt Armendariz

Travel

This week's dream: A teen-friendly tour of New Zealand

Maybe you, too, have a son like Cal, said Geoff Edgers in *The Washington Post*. By the time he was 8, he'd been to Norway, Jordan, Spain, and Greece, but lately, "he's developed into a real homebody," and my wife and I sometimes worry, because "we want him to remember there is a world beyond our front door." New Zealand is a long way away, of course, but Cal is a fan of the *Lord of the Rings* films, and when he admitted an interest in the country when we prodded him to pick a destination for a 16th birthday trip, we acted. Now we just had to make the journey fun for all of us.

Visitors outside the Green Dragon Inn at Hobbiton

"Are we just going to be *go, go, go*?" Cal asked. Yes, he wanted to see New Zealand, but he let us know he also wanted time to "just chill." So we let him pick the trip's first activity after our long flight landed us in Auckland, and he chose Iron Age Comics. It turned out to be a "fantastic" store packed with sci-fi and superhero memorabilia, and afterward, we filled out the rest of our recovery day by simply strolling the harbor. (Lesson 1: "Resist the urge to turn every moment into a teen enrichment exercise.") For our next stop, I'd chosen rural Lake Taupo, with a converted shipping container as our Airbnb. While I made a store run, my wife texted me a photo of Cal mingling with three young cows. "He said this is the most beautiful place he's ever seen," she wrote. (Lesson 2: "Look for cool, unexpected accommodations.")

Next up was Waitomo, a village whose caves are famously illuminated by glowworms. We intentionally arrived early, without letting Cal know that the abandoned railroad line we began exploring was a known draw. By the time Cal started grumbling, it was glowworm time. (Lesson 3: "Never mention a hike or any preplanning.") Finally, we headed for Hobbiton, the hobbit-style town that filmmaker Peter Jackson created for his signature blockbusters. It's a tourist destination, for sure, but it's "not cheesy," more a magically serene place to explore. Later, my wife asked Cal, still aglow from hobbit holes, where he might want to go after high school graduation. And our teen homebody answered, "Hong Kong."

■ *At Hobbiton (hobbitontours.com), a four-hour family tour costs about $195.*

Hotel of the week

Mirbeau's new flagship

Mirbeau Inn & Spa
Beacon, N.Y.

This new spa hotel "oozes an undeniably impressionist-inspired aesthetic," said Veronica M. Stoddart in *Travel & Leisure*. The "castle-like" mansion at its heart was once the Hudson Valley home of a Civil War general, and the building's high ceilings, "eye-catching" wallpapers, and chandeliers "echo its High Victorian Gothic roots." A new building that adds most of the inn's 72 guest rooms gracefully carries over the château-style details, and the property's three dining rooms are "visual showstoppers, reminiscent of a grand Loire Valley estate." The spa itself is "a hushed, serene sanctuary." It includes a solarium, a heated outdoor whirlpool, and a candlelit resting area.
beacon.mirbeau.com; doubles from $533

Getting the flavor of...

Snorkeling in the Blue Ridge Mountains

"Many people associate snorkeling with oceans, but rivers can be just as rewarding," said Annie Brown Verdin in *Afar*. The French Broad River in North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains is home to more than 50 fish species as well as freshwater mussels, native crayfish, and the ancient giant salamanders known as eastern hellbenders. On a recent tour led by biologist Kevin Merrill, co-founder of Oxbow River Snorkeling, I happily don the wet suit and snorkel-equipped mask Merrill provides. We're then told we'll be traveling upstream, and "within minutes, I'm horizontal, gripping mossy rocks and pulling myself against the push of the cool mountain water." I don't realize at first that I'm holding my breath. But I settle in after spotting a school of red-and-orange gilt darters, then join Merrill to watch a purple-bellied river chub moving pebbles one by one to build an underwater nest. Merrill has much knowledge to share, but I'm letting my own curiosity guide me when a saffron shiner settles below me. "Is he wondering about me as much as I'm inspecting him?"

Santa Ana's Latino heart

Santa Ana, Calif., is "a city that feels old and new, and definitely not cookie cutter," said Cynthia Rebolledo in *Thrillist*. The downtown area is "the historic heart of Latinos in Orange County," and it "beats to a grassroots pulse," with colorful murals adorning its walls and setting the tone of the city's "proudly local" culture. The Grand Central Art Center and gallery-filled Santora Arts Building "anchor a walkable district of cafés, boutiques, quinceañera shops, and bars." To get your bearings, "grab a coffee at Cafe Cito and stroll 4th Street." You'll discover "a movable feast" at 4th Street Market, though lunch options also include the acclaimed Burritos La Palma and such "legendary" food trucks as Mariscos El Yaqui and Alebrijes, for Mexico City–style fare. For nightlife, there's the dive scene at Mission Bar, nonstop cumbia at Ritmo Santanero, and live music at La Santa, an intimate underground venue. One last tip: "If you spot Mr. Diablito, the *frutero* on the corner of 4th and Bush, don't skip his fiery snacks."

How to survive a group vacation

When you plan a week away with friends, you imagine sunshine all day and lively dinners followed by games, said Hannah Sampson in *The Washington Post*. But to ensure everyone remains pals, do set some ground rules. First, agree on a budget. Your BFF "may have let's-rent-a-yacht-money," but you shouldn't have to help cover his or her splurges. Also, "decide on the vibe." Will this be a nonstop party or a quiet retreat? Once on site, establish how costs will be shared, whether via an app like Venmo or more casually. Don't pull in unexpected visitors, because "everyone must sign off on surprise drop-ins," and pets, too. As for food management, "think of the trip like an ongoing potluck," with everyone helping to keep a group grocery list and planning meals in and nights out. Finally, "if you're not cooking, you're cleaning."

Alamy

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Best Properties on the Market

This week: Homes under $1 million

Ram Real Estate Group/Cincy Snaps

1 ◀ Green Township, Ohio Covedale Gables is a 1921 8.5-acre Tudor estate in a Cincinnati suburb. The three-bedroom main house opens to a marble and limestone foyer that connects to a living room with stained-glass windows, wood-paneled walls, intricate plaster ceilings, and a solarium with a Venetian window; downstairs is a Prohibition-era speakeasy behind a hidden door. The property includes a one-bedroom gatehouse, a patio with a fountain, mature trees, and yards. $999,900. Rakesh Ram, Coldwell Banker Realty, (513) 608-1199

2 ▶ Accord, N.Y. On more than 4 acres in the Hudson Valley, this 1994 Brutalist-inspired home is part log cabin, part glass-and-steel cottage. The three-bedroom features a two-story glass wall, a central steel-and-concrete staircase, maple floors, exposed beams, and a minimalist, wood-clad chef's kitchen. Outside are a patio with a hot tub, stone walls, and access to woods and hiking; culture and dining in Kingston are about a half-hour away. $995,000. Kathryn Johnson, William Pitt Sotheby's International Realty, (917) 826-7050

Dominique Shuminova (left), Nils Schlebusch (right)

MediaKingsman

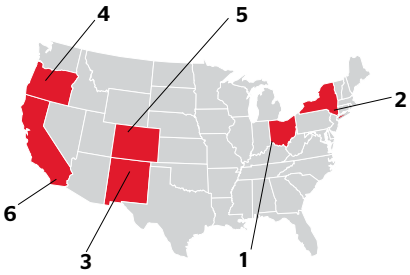
3 ◀ Santa Fe This two-story 1978 adobe condo house is in the Llano Compound, a historic enclave. The one-bedroom home has exposed wood beams, a kiva fireplace, tile floors, a second kitchen fireplace, and a spiral staircase to an upstairs primary suite with wood floors and mountain views. The lot includes a private, terraced stone patio. The Santa Fe Plaza downtown is a five-minute drive. $998,000. Skye Smith, Sotheby's International Realty—Santa Fe—326 Grant Avenue Brokerage, (505) 470-1150

Best Properties on the Market

4 ◀ Bend, Ore. In a central Oregon city known for outdoor activities, this 2012 three-bedroom Prairie-influenced Craftsman is on a tree-lined residential street. Vaulted ceilings top slate floors, wood-trimmed windows, oak built-ins, and a gas fireplace with ocher tiles; the primary suite has a coffered ceiling and heated bathroom floors. The backyard includes a pergola over a patio, plus a fountain, raised garden beds, and a fenced yard. $749,900. Holly Perzynski, Windermere Real Estate/Luxury Portfolio International, (541) 241-4393

5 ▶ Oak Creek, Colo. About 20 miles from Steamboat Springs and its ski resorts, this 2019 two-bedroom Scandinavian-modern mountain home is on 35 acres in the Yampa Valley. Its open-plan layout includes a freestanding wood-burning stove, pale wood floors, and a kitchen with a waterfall island and flat-front cabinets, plus a primary bedroom and bunk room. Glass sliders open to a patio, a flat backyard, and an elevated deck surrounded by forest. Town is about 10 minutes away. $995,000. Cheryl Foote, Compass, (970) 846-6444

GTR Photo



Steal of the week

6 ◀ Palm Springs, Calif. Located in the desert-modern Racquet Club Cottages West community designed by influential architect William F. Cody, this 1964 one-bedroom was gut-renovated in 2022. At just over 500 square feet, the condo has walls of glass, a sleek kitchen with quartz counters and a Wolf induction range, and a bedroom nook. Outside are a covered patio with a breeze-block screen, a cactus garden, a lawn, and access to a shared pool. $495,000. Marc Lange, Equity Union, (760) 834-5484

BUSINESS

The News at a Glance

The bottom line

■ Apple eclipsed Nvidia as the world's most valuable company again this week, as the chipmaker gave up its top spot for the first time since June 2025. Apple's shares are up 24% this year, giving it a market cap of $4.95 trillion.
CNBC.com

■ On the backs of smash hits like *The Odyssey*, *Project Hail Mary*, and *Michael*, movie box-office revenues so far are in line with those of 2019, and overall ticket sales are 10% higher than at the same point in 2025, according to Rentrak. At this pace, yearly domestic grosses are expected to hit $10 billion for the first time since the onset of the pandemic.
Variety

■ Only 7,133 Tesla Cybertrucks have been registered in the U.S. this year through May, according to S&P Global Mobility data. Since 2023, the vehicle's sales are on a slower pace than the infamous Edsel, which Ford discontinued in 1959, two years after launching it.
Bloomberg

■ Global commercial aviation set a record on July 23, with flight-tracking platform Flightradar24 recording 153,359 commercial flights in a single day. The milestone came just weeks after the International Air Transport Association pointed to weakening passenger demand.
Newsweek

■ The country's largest public companies shelled out close to $600 million on about 15,000 perks for their executives and directors last year. Liquor firm Constellation Brands gave its CEO $20,000 in free booze, while Texas Roadhouse paid its CEO's $131,000 initiation and membership fees at Valhalla Golf Club.
The Wall Street Journal

Stocks: Chip sell-off rattles Wall Street

More than $1.3 trillion was wiped off the market capitalizations of the largest memory-chip stocks this week as investors fretted about AI spending, said **Kai Nicol-Schwarz** and **Lee Ying Shan** in ***CNBC.com***. Nvidia lost $238 billion after its share price tumbled nearly 4%. Other chipmakers including SK Hynix, Samsung, Micron, AMD, and TSMC each lost over $100 billion. Chip manufacturers have been "one of the main beneficiaries of the AI boom," but there are concerns that AI infrastructure spending has peaked. Investors also reacted unfavorably to reports that Nvidia was investing up to $250 billion in an Ohio data-center project for OpenAI that would use its chips—reviving concerns about circular financing in AI deals.

AI spending concerns continue.

Nvidia can afford to help its customers, said **Karen Kwok** in ***Reuters Breakingviews***, but when its customers are "unprofitable model developers, including OpenAI and Anthropic," it adds "complexity and concerns." Investors also are right to worry about the incestuous nature of the relationships between AI companies and their chip suppliers. Last year, for instance, Nvidia's shares jumped 4% when it unveiled a similar OpenAI investment tie-up. This time, the stock dropped 4%. Nvidia has made a fortune "selling picks and shovels to the AI gold rush." But it's getting riskier to rely on AI companies that are digging themselves a deeper hole.

Fed: Rates stay on hold after divided vote

The Federal Reserve decided to hold interest rates steady this month, said Jeff Cox in *CNBC.com*. Rates will be held at 3.5% to 3.75% for the time being, "but not without opposition from three officials who expressed concern about inflation." Dallas Fed President Lorie Logan, Cleveland's Beth Hammack, and Minneapolis Fed chief Neel Kashkari dissented in favor of raising rates by a quarter percentage point. New chairman Kevin Warsh said "price stability" is the bank's goal and that it "will not hesitate to act" on inflation, which is of concern given rising oil prices and President Trump's latest tariff announcements.

J&J: Health giant offers $5.5 billion to settle talc suits

Health-care giant Johnson & Johnson has agreed to pay $5.5 billion to resolve thousands of claims that its talc baby powder caused ovarian cancer, said Xavier Martinez and Elias Schisgall in *The Wall Street Journal*. The company hopes the settlement offer this week will end litigation that has "been going on for more than a decade," though the agreement is dependent on "95% of remaining claimants participating." J&J has made other settlement attempts, including a $8 billion offer in 2024 as part of a bankruptcy maneuver that a judge rejected.

Minnesota: Judge blocks ban on prediction markets

A federal judge blocked a law banning prediction markets in Minnesota this week, days before it was set to go into effect, said Lauren McCarthy in *The New York Times*. Judge Kate M. Menendez granted a preliminary injunction, noting that companies like Polymarket and Kalshi "faced a threat of irreparable harm" as a result of the law. Minnesota was the first to outlaw prediction markets, citing rising rates of gambling addiction, and several other states are weighing similar legislation. The Commodity Futures Trading Commission sued Minnesota, arguing that "the platforms can be regulated only at the federal level."

Cracker Barrel: CEO out after 'woke' logo protest

Julie Masino resigned as chief executive of Cracker Barrel this week after she triggered a "political maelstrom over proposed modernizations to its branding," said Gaya Gupta in *The Guardian*. The outcry began last year after Masino revealed an updated logo for the homestyle restaurant chain that was missing Uncle Herschel, the familiar old-timer in overalls. Critics said the chain had gone "woke," and even President Trump demanded on social media that the company "admit a mistake." Masino quickly dropped the rebranded logo in response, but the company's stock price hasn't rebounded.

The generation that AI can't impress

"Some kids will never think AI is cool," said Elana Klein in *Wired*. In fact, the hottest take among the youngest cohort, so-called Generation Alpha, is to reject AI entirely. While adoption rates are high—particularly for "school assignments and companionship"—37% of teens now "cringe when they see AI content like music and videos," and over a quarter believe artificial intelligence "will have a negative impact on society in the next 20 years." Many of them cited job losses, environmental concerns, and "the decline of critical-thinking skills." Some students have started calling people "dumb for using it" instead of using their own intelligence. New generations typically "adopt new consumer technology eagerly." But this demographic doesn't care for the way that AI is being pushed on them by adults and tech companies. Melanie Green, a communications professor at SUNY Buffalo, said they are also "acutely aware that whatever disruption happens, their generation is going to be bearing the brunt of it."

Getty (2)

Surprise billing: The hidden cost of consumer protection

A law aimed at curtailing surprise medical billing has been surprisingly lucrative for doctors, said **Anna Wilde Mathews** and **Tom McGinty** in ***The Wall Street Journal***. Health-care providers were awarded nearly $15 billion last year from arbitrators called in to settle medical billing disputes, more than triple the amount in 2024. It's an unintended result of the No Surprises Act, passed by Congress in 2020 in response to a surge of complaints from patients about "huge, unexpected bills from doctors who weren't in their insurers' networks." Patients are no longer responsible for those bills, but their insurers now battle doctors in arbitration hearings "over how much they will pay." Doctors are winning around 80% of the cases. Some insurance groups allege that the system is getting "gamed," said **Sarah Kliff** in ***The New York Times***. Seeing the favorable results, "a growing number of medical providers and billing firms have begun using it to obtain higher payments for scheduled procedures"—and then winning payments "that are 10 or hundreds of times as high as what insurance typically pays."

No Surprises Act: A win for arbitrators

The No Surprises Act has spared millions of Americans from unexpected medical costs, said **Lisa Jarvis** in ***Bloomberg***. It "addressed a real problem many Americans regularly experienced." Unfortunately, that great bipartisan achievement is getting abused, which means patients will start "paying the bill in other ways." Several insurers, like UnitedHealthcare of New York, have already said that "costs associated with the dispute process accounted for a portion of its premium hike for next year," which could be as high as 9%. "What began as an exercise in consumer protection" is instead becoming "another force pushing health care out of Americans' reach."

It's a perfect example of a policy with consequences "nearly the opposite of what was intended," said ***The Wall Street Journal*** in an editorial. The Biden administration estimated there would be 17,000 disputes every year; last year, there were 2.6 million. Part of the problem is that "arbitrators don't often throw out ineligible claims." The government should audit and discredit the obvious money grabs. However, the Trump administration "finalized a Biden-proposed rule aimed at making arbitration more efficient and less expensive." This will only "encourage more claims."

Early drafts of the No Surprises Act foresaw this very issue, said the ***Washington Examiner***. Those drafts required "insurers to pay out-of-network providers a clear, market-based benchmark rate," which was usually tied to the median in-network price for the same service in the same area. "This was the simplest and fairest solution." But hospitals and medical groups argued this would be too favorable for insurers. And so instead the arbitration process has become "a racket." Congress must fix its mistake.

What the experts say

■ Gen Z's 'retirement maxxers'

A lot of young people have gotten "obsessed with saving," said Josyana Joshua in *Bloomberg*. The same generation that embraces so-called looksmaxxing—an online neologism that refers to maximizing one's physical appearance—is "now retirement maxxing as well." Workers are "opening retirement accounts earlier than prior generations and contributing the maximum allowed each year." Locked out of other ways of accumulating wealth, such as homeownership, maxing out a 401(k) "offers the promise of security and freedom later, even if it means waiting years to receive the benefits." Some supersavers say they also just want "enough of a cushion that they won't someday get trapped in a job they don't like."

■ ETF launches near a record high

Investment firms are on track to launch a record number of exchange-traded funds this year in a bid to capture the latest stock market trends, said Steve Johnson in the *Financial Times*. As of mid-July, "1,084 new ETFs had been listed, including funds offering leveraged bets on equity indices or individual stocks." That's almost as many new ETFs as were listed all of last year. Some new funds are incredibly niche—like the coffee-and-energy-drinks ETF from Corgi Funds, which is "on course to overtake BlackRock, the world's largest asset manager, as the biggest issuer by number of funds." Almost a quarter of the new launches this year "have been leveraged single-stock funds in a sign of investors' growing appetite for risky bets." There are now almost 6,000 ETFs trading in the U.S., more than double the number in 2021.

■ Where every day is Senior Day

Some college students are trading dorm life for a room in a retirement community, said Jessica Hall in *MarketWatch*. "As Americans face challenges with affordable housing as well as a loneliness epidemic," a handful of colleges have started initiatives to promote intergenerational living. Marquette University student Daija Holliday, 25, pays $500 a month for a one-bedroom apartment at St. Camillus Life Plan Community in Milwaukee—about one-third of the local market rate. In exchange, Holliday does "eight hours of volunteer work per week with the residents while pursuing her degree in counseling psychology." She notes that St. Camillus suits her but might not be a fit for other students. By 8 p.m., Holliday said, "things get pretty quiet here."

Charity of the week

The Farmer's House (thefarmershouse.org) has helped children and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities since 2006. Founded by two Missouri moms, Suzanne Zimmerman and Peach Cunningham, who wanted to fill a gap for other local mothers of children with special needs, the nonprofit started as a working farm offering vocational training and a fun learning environment. It is now a community program with seven locations across Missouri offering various opportunities to learn job and social skills. Staff and volunteers opened the nonprofit's first market in 2012 to help support its initiatives, selling kitchenware, home goods, and other specialty items like pickled foods and homemade pies. Today, there are three markets that serve as training hubs where students with developmental differences can come to gain practical work experience through short-term, paid internships.

Each charity we feature has earned a four-star overall rating from Charity Navigator, which rates not-for-profit organizations on the strength of their finances, their governance practices, and the transparency of their operations. Four stars is the group's highest rating.

Getty

Best Columns: Business

Paramount-Warner: Can states kill the deal?

The Ellison clan thought that cozying up to "a powerful new president would open doors to even greater riches," said **Mark Gongloff** in ***Bloomberg***, but it hasn't worked out that way. Oracle founder Larry Ellison, 81, "is President Trump's neighbor in Florida" and has backed his political campaigns with millions of dollars. "Trump's government, in turn, has given Oracle a key role in running TikTok and a $7 billion Pentagon contract." So what does Oracle have to show for all that favoritism? Not much. Its stock has fallen more than 60% since September. Ellison's son David, 43, the CEO of Paramount Skydance, likewise used his Trump ties—and his dad's financial support—to secure approval to merge his firm with Warner Bros. Discovery and gain control of two major movie studios, streaming service HBO Max, and news channel CNN. But that deal is now in serious jeopardy after 12 Democratic state attorneys general filed an antitrust lawsuit to block it, and a federal judge appears sympathetic to their claims.

David Ellison: Delaying merger for now

Most of Hollywood still expects the deal to go through "one way or another," said **Kim Masters** in ***Puck***. Paramount said this week it could be months before there's a resolution. That's a concern: The Ellisons "face a looming $7-million-a-day ticking fee" for every day this thing drags past September. But they also owe Warner a $7 billion breakup fee if the deal falls through. This will likely bring David Ellison to the table. California Attorney General Rob Bonta says "structural remedies" are needed for a settlement, which could mean divesting from CBS, spinning off CNN, or selling parts of Paramount's streaming services. With leverage now on their side, the states "have every reason to hold out for more than a pound of flesh."

Critics of the deal are "ignoring a basic economic reality," said **Alex Ciccone** in the ***New York Post***. Not all corporate consolidation is "inherently nefarious." Years of weak profitability have left Warner Bros. "a shadow of its former self," saddled with more than $30 billion in debt. Getting rescued by Paramount could boost California's film industry, not destroy it. After California blocked a JetBlue–Spirit Airlines merger in 2024, Spirit laid off 17,000 workers, filed for bankruptcy, and left thousands stranded. Now the state "insists on repeating the same mistake." It's clear that the AGs' intent is to "deny David Ellison control of CNN," said ***The Wall Street Journal*** in an editorial. He "catered to Trump" with his choice of *Free Press* founder Bari Weiss to run CBS News. But that choice has led to falling ratings and "lackluster performance." Bad antitrust policy shouldn't be invoked to block what "may be a bad business deal."

The lawsuit highlights "the importance of not surrendering to authoritarianism prematurely," said **Michelle Goldberg** for ***The New York Times***. "Obviously, David Ellison could still prevail. But at the very least, the delay is likely to cost him a lot of money." And the mere possibility that the deal could be defeated has "strengthened resistance in Hollywood." It suggests that a way to beat the forces of Trumpism is to "take a page from his playbook and flood the zone with opposition." That strategy worked for "ending Trump's 'weaponization' slush fund" and "stripping Trump's name off the Kennedy Center." It might just be enough to stop the Trump takeover of Hollywood.

Keep your hands off my Benz

Editorial
The Wall Street Journal

"Are Mercedes-Benz cars Chinese sleeper-cell spies?" asked *The Wall Street Journal*. New bipartisan Senate legislation treats them as such. The bill would ban the U.S. sale of cars from manufacturers "if Chinese investors own more than 15% of their shares." It just so happens that the German luxury automaker has two passive Chinese shareholders that together own 19.7% of shares. It's an arbitrary threshold until you learn that rival General Motors was lobbying for that Chinese equity ownership limit. The union-supported bill also prohibits cars with "connected" software if they are supplied by Chinese companies. "It's not paranoid to worry that adversaries" could exploit in-car software, which can potentially be used to monitor drivers. "Such concerns spurred the Biden administration to ban" connected vehicles made by Chinese manufacturers, and the Trump administration last month barred new cars from Polestar, owned by China's Geely, from the U.S. market. But Volvo, which has the same majority owner, won an exemption from the blacklist "for unspecified reasons," suggesting political favoritism. The United Auto Workers just "wants to punish Mercedes for opposing the union at its plant in Alabama." If the bill succeeds, that plant would fold, and Mercedes would be gone.

The return of Trump's tariff tomfoolery

Steven Greenhouse
The Guardian

President Trump hasn't kicked his tariff addiction, said Steven Greenhouse. After a brief respite, Trump is again scrambling to find new ways to tax nations he disagrees with. Last week, he invoked a Smoot-Hawley provision from 1930 to slap Canada with a 50% levy on many goods, and his justification was "preposterous." Trump said Canada has discriminated against U.S. companies for halting liquor imports and putting a 25% tariff on U.S.-made cars. But Canada only implemented those measures *in response* to Trump's earlier tariffs. He is essentially telling our northern neighbors, "I have a right to punch you in the nose," but if you punch me back, "that's illegal discrimination." His justification for a new round of "across-the-board 10% or 12.5% tariffs on goods from more than 80 countries" is even more hollow. Trump is using "a law provision that lets Washington punish countries that fail to take enough action against forced labor." Trump has never shown concern for worker exploitation before. His administration "chopped more than $500 million from the Labor Department's efforts to investigate and fight against forced labor, child labor, and human trafficking." Trump is "thumping his chest" over his end run around the courts. But his "delusional, destructive tariff tomfoolery" will only serve to "push up prices, squeeze Americans' wallets, and anger other countries."

Getty

The sportsman who wrote *Pumping Iron*

Charles Gaines
1942-2026

Charles Gaines turned his pursuit of adventure into a career. A journalist, author, and screenwriter, Gaines specialized in spinning his passions, including mountaineering and bodybuilding, into stories with mass appeal. Best remembered for writing and narrating the hit 1977 documentary *Pumping Iron*, which launched Arnold Schwarzenegger's movie career, Gaines lived to see another of his creations—a sport called the National Survival Game, which was later rechristened "paintball"—become a billion-dollar industry. "Follow your bliss," he said. "I have a lot of admiration for people who shape a life around their bliss and follow it all the way."

Raised in Alabama in "a privileged milieu of maids and country clubs," Charles Latham Gaines III began lifting weights as a teenager, said *The New York Times*. His aim, he later wrote, was to develop "cantaloupe deltoids and grapefruit biceps." While he never got that ripped, his interest in bodybuilding made him the ideal writer to publicize the sport. *Stay Hungry*, his 1972 novel set in the lifting world, became a best seller and was adapted into a 1976 Jeff Bridges movie. Then came *Pumping Iron*, which sought to celebrate the "dedication and artistry" of men often written off as narcissistic meatheads, said *The Telegraph* (U.K.). As he followed Lou Ferrigno and other bodybuilders who were vying to win the Mr. Olympia competition, Gaines found an "especially articulate and engaging champion of the sport" in Schwarzenegger. *Pumping Iron* became an unexpected hit, and its Austrian-born star a lifelong friend.

Gaines' Hollywood success financed "an increasingly frenetic lifestyle" of fancy dinners, custom suits, and exotic fishing trips, said *The Washington Post*. But when he realized his fame was threatening his marriage, he left Hollywood, bought 160 acres in Nova Scotia, and recommitted himself to his family and the outdoors, writing acclaimed books about both. In 1980, a bet with a Wall Street trader over who was better equipped to survive in the wilderness led Gaines to organize a competition in which friends ran around the woods, firing air guns loaded with paint pellets at one another. That was the birth of paintball, although Gaines sold his shares in the sport just a few years later, preferring to focus on fly-fishing tournaments. "Fishing is like asking some gigantic question of the universe," he said. "Every time you throw your fly out there, that's a question. The bite of the fish is the answer."

The consultant who steered California pols

Clint Reilly
1947-2026

Clint Reilly was an unlikely force in California politics. Committed to social justice, the Bay Area native first studied for the priesthood and spent years ministering to the poor. But after turning to politics, he cut a decidedly different figure, as a Jaguar-driving, Italian-suited operative so pitiless that one former client dubbed him "Satan." Reilly ran winning campaigns in the 1980s and '90s for some of California's top Democrats, including eventual House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Sens. Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein. Known for sharp attack ads, lavish spending, and whopping fees, Reilly pioneered the integration of previously disparate services such as polling, direct mailing, and advertising. "When the opponent knows you have him on your side," former San Francisco mayor Frank Jordan said in 1994, "a chill goes up their spine."

Born in Oakland, where his father was a milkman, Reilly attended Catholic schools, looking up to a priest who was "passionate about supporting the underdogs," said the *Los Angeles Times*. He spent nine years in seminary before pivoting to politics as a more effective way to change lives. He got his "big break" in 1979, when he ran the long-shot mayoral campaign of San Francisco Supervisor Quentin Kopp. "Kopp lost, but Reilly's name stuck," and in 1987, he led Pelosi to victory over 13 opponents in her first congressional campaign. Reilly "became known for reducing races to a small number of forceful themes," said the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He then drove them home "through polished, sometimes harsh advertising." At one point, he fired Feinstein as a client by publicly saying she lacked "fire in the belly."

Reilly left political consulting in 1995 and became a successful commercial real estate investor, said *The New York Times*, though in 1999 he "became a candidate himself," running a losing bid for San Francisco mayor. Acquiring a portfolio of downtown office buildings and event spaces, he also bought media properties including the *San Francisco Examiner*—a paper he'd once sued, claiming its editor shoved him while he was complaining about its coverage. Remaining true to his progressive ideals, he gave prolifically to charities and founded a nonprofit that offered scholarships to low-income students. If that humanitarian impulse contrasted with his cutthroat consulting style, he made no apologies for it. Candidates "are not hiring me because they want me to get along with everybody," he once said. "The campaign is a war, you know?"

Gaines Family, Clint Reilly

The husky-voiced singer who ruled '80s power ballads

Bonnie Tyler
1951-2026

Bonnie Tyler's signature rasp came about by accident. In 1976, the Welsh singer had vocal cord nodules removed and was supposed to refrain from speaking for six weeks. That was impossible for the self-described "chatterbox," and the scream of frustration she let out one day permanently altered her voice, leaving it huskier and edgier. A year later, her country-inflected "It's a Heartache" became a U.S. hit, and she was able to command the talents of Meat Loaf's operatic songwriter, Jim Steinman. He gave her "Total Eclipse of the Heart," originally intended for an unfinished Nosferatu musical, and the bombastic ballad launched her to global popularity. "When I first heard it," Tyler said, "I just cried at the intense emotion of it."

Born Gaynor Hopkins, Tyler grew up in a Welsh village, where her mother sang while doing chores and encouraged her dreams of stardom. "The shy daughter of a coal miner," she fronted pub-rock bands until her discovery by a talent scout, said *The New York Times*. But "little could have prepared her for the smash success" of "Total Eclipse." The video, "extravagant even by 1980s standards" with its swirling ninjas and creepy altar boys, "seemed to play once an hour on MTV."

Tyler followed "Total Eclipse" with "a run of memorable singles," said *Rolling Stone*, including "Holding Out for a Hero," which featured prominently on the *Footloose* soundtrack. Over the next several decades, her popularity waned in the U.S. but not as much in the U.K., and she "continued to tour and record" in Europe. She was always happy to perform her biggest hit, and once belted it out on a cruise ship during an actual solar eclipse. "It's such an anthem, and such a wonderful feeling," she said. "I never get tired of singing it."

Fleeing the Hermit Kingdom

After more than a decade of planning, a North Korean family made a daring escape to South Korea, said **Choe Sang-Hun** in **The New York Times**. Could they adapt to life in their new home?

SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA—Rain lashed a flimsy wooden boat as it tossed through a churning sea, its engine straining against the swell. Under the cover of a stormy night three years ago, the vessel was fleeing North Korea.

On board were nine people, including two small children and a woman who was six months pregnant. Only a couple of the passengers had seafaring experience. They eluded a patrol ship, speeding across the world's most heavily guarded maritime border.

Soon after their boat lurched into South Korean waters, a high-speed warship of the South's navy bore down on it, tearing the water in aggressive circles. Snipers on the vessel trained their laser sights on the chests of the three adult men on the wooden boat.

Through a loudspeaker, a voice boomed: "Are you lost? Engine trouble?"

The North Koreans shouted: "Please help. We are defecting."

The red dots remained stubbornly fixed on their chests. The South Koreans were taking no chances: The three men were clad in North Korean military uniforms, camouflage for a high-stakes escape. Desperate, the men shouted into the boat's cramped hold for the other passengers to emerge to prove that they were civilians. From below, the two children, a 5-year-old girl and 3-year-old boy, were hauled up first, both pale and wasted from seasickness. Only then did the red dots drop off.

The North Koreans, led by Kim Il-hyeok and his younger brother, Yi-hyeok, were bound together by blood and marriage. The brothers, both in their 30s at the time, were accompanied by their mother and their families: Il-hyeok's partner, who was pregnant, and Yi-hyeok's wife, their two children, his mother-in-law, and his brother-in-law.

The family, who defected in 2023, were among the few who managed to escape North Korea after its leader, Kim Jong Un, imposed a crushing lockdown during the coronavirus pandemic. They arrived in their adopted country with rare insights into a nation that had been choked off from the outside world. Some details of their escape have not been previously reported.

"That night," said Yi-hyeok's wife, Yu-mi, "we crossed from a sea of darkness to a sea of freedom."

Kim Yu-mi, right, defected along with her two children and her mother.

THE BROTHERS CAME from Pyoksong, a county in North Korea's southwest. During the famine of the late 1990s, their father, a railway security official, returned with grim accounts from the hardest-hit provinces: The emaciated bodies of children found outside train stations were frozen solid, thumping like frozen fish when they were tossed onto trucks headed to burial grounds. He was the first in the family to lose faith in a ruling class that was unable to feed its people.

One night after his sons reached adulthood, he took them to a hill and pointed toward a cluster of lights across the South Korean border. "That's where we should go," he said. "To live and stand tall."

Yu-mi lived in the nearby coastal town of Kangryong. From there, she could see planes glinting in the sun as they rose from Incheon International Airport, just across the water—a shimmering vision of possibility, yet unreachable for North Koreans barred from travel and cut off from the internet. "Our country felt like a prison without bars," she said.

Beginning in kindergarten, children sang the anthem "We Have Nothing to Envy," even as they were mobilized to haul river water or scour hills for herbs and pine nuts. After long workdays, adults attended compulsory "life review sessions," writing self-criticism and pledges of loyalty. When Kim Jong Un visited an island near Yu-mi's town in 2013, soldiers and villagers swarmed into the sea in jubilation. She knew the scene was staged; ordinary residents, she said, had been banned from leaving home.

In the face of the propaganda, a contraband culture spread. South Korean films and dramas circulated on USB drives smuggled from China. In Kangryong, the devices also arrived inside plastic bottles released by South Korean activists across the water, along with rice and mini-Bibles. Officials warned the bottles contained poison, but South Korean entertainment was winning.

Il-hyeok idolized K-pop groups like Girls' Generation and styled his hair in a Mohawk like BigBang's Taeyang. He was arrested for "capitalist delinquency" and released only after paying a bribe, his hair razored. He and his friends once secretly watched *Valkyrie*, the Tom Cruise film about the plot to kill Adolf Hitler. When the conspirators failed and were executed, his friends wept.

The brothers' notion of deserting North Korea felt just as perilous. Their father forbade them from marrying, reasoning that the larger the family, the greater the risk of being caught while defecting. He then used connections to transfer Yi-hyeok, his youngest, to Kangryong, where he learned navigation, mapped guard posts, and cultivated ties with officials. Yi-hyeok became a helmet diver, who harvests seafood from the ocean floor, breathing fresh air piped through a surface hose. He eventually met Yu-mi.

Il-hyeok worked in North Korea's shadow economy, bribing his way into opportunity and out of trouble. He butchered animals for restaurants, ran a small gold mine, and bought and sold rice stolen from state granaries. He also grew disillusioned with the system he was gaming.

Then, in 2014, their father died unexpectedly. The South Korean dream seemed to die with him.

Where Il-hyeok, the older brother, was restless, Yi-hyeok was steady. He married Yu-mi in 2017, and the couple soon had their two children. He joined a military-run fisheries company, operating three vessels. Despite a United Nations ban, Chinese buyers worked openly in Kangryong, and on a good day, Yi-hyeok could earn more than a typical worker's annual salary.

Il-hyeok began dating a kindergarten teacher. Defection was no longer a priority. "When I mentioned it, my brother told me to watch my mouth," Il-hyeok recalled.

Woohae Cho/The New York Times (2)

THE PANDEMIC OVERTURNED everything. North Korea imposed one of the world's harshest lockdowns. In Kangryong, access to the sea was closed off with barbed wire and armed guards. Yi-hyeok's boats rusted and his debts mounted. Officials claimed that South Korea was dumping infected bodies and waste into border waters. Yet boats supplying seafood to the top tiers of society continued to fish. "The elites still ate whatever they wanted," Yu-mi said.

Public executions grew more frequent, targeting those accused of committing violent crimes like murder, which surged during the lockdown, or of distributing "nonsocialist" content such as South Korean dramas. Thousands, including the brothers, were forced to watch as rifle fire cracked across the execution grounds. The crowds dispersed in silence. "The goal was to instill fear," Il-hyeok said. "To erase any fantasy about the outside world."

The brothers no longer argued about whether to leave—only how. By early 2023, North Korea had begun easing its pandemic restrictions. Yi-hyeok's boats were among the first permitted back to sea. But the window to escape was already closing. Authorities were preparing to install cameras along the coast to deter defections.

The brothers spoke in code over the phone. "Good weather" meant a storm was coming, forcing patrol boats back to port. "We've got a good catch—come down here" meant Il-hyeok should bring their mother and his girlfriend to Kangryong.

The weather and the catch were ideal on May 6, 2023. Yu-mi's mother, a 52-year-old widow, signed up last, five hours before departure. "I could die trying to escape," she said. "But if my family reached the South and I stayed behind, I'd be as good as dead anyway—the relative of traitors."

Yi-hyeok's brother-in-law, his fishing partner, slipped away by boat and waited offshore. The rest of the family crossed a coastal hill strewn with land mines to reach a secluded beach. To carry Yi-hyeok's two young children more easily, the brothers sealed them inside burlap sacks and hoisted them onto their shoulders. Before they closed the sacks, Yu-mi caught her children looking up at her.

"I thought it might be the last time I'd ever see them," she said. "I cried, and my husband teared up, too."

Yi-hyeok's brother-in-law spotted the prearranged signal—a flashlight blinking three times from the beach—and steered the boat in to pick up the rest of the extended family. Around 10 p.m., the 30-foot-long vessel pulled away, its engine throttled down to little more than a brisk walking pace as it tried to slip quietly toward Yeonpyeong Island in South Korea, just 9 miles away.

Below deck, Yu-mi suddenly felt the engine roar to full throttle, filling the hold with exhaust and leaving the women and children seasick. Her youngest child's eyes rolled back. She carried him up for fresh air—and found the men on deck in a panic. "That's when I saw a searchlight from a North Korean patrol boat sweeping across the waves behind us," she said. "My heart dropped."

The brothers had already agreed on what to do if they couldn't outrun a security vessel: strap life jackets and flashlights onto the women and children and send them into the sea, trusting the current to carry them south. The men would steer the boat away as a decoy, making a last stand with 20-inch knives and homemade red-pepper bombs. To lighten the boat, Il-hyeok threw anything heavy overboard—axes, wrenches, a fishing net, his brother's air compressor for helmet diving.

Gradually, the searchlight behind them faded. The brothers later speculated that the fishing net they had thrown overboard had tangled in the pursuing boat's propeller. Their two-hour gamble ended shortly after midnight, after the South Korean vessel stopped them and all nine family members were brought aboard.

An officer greeted them: "Welcome to paradise."

Kim Il-hyeok, in his new neighborhood in Seoul

IN THE SOUTH, Yu-mi studied to gain an accounting clerk certificate and found work at a school. Her brother enrolled in college, while Yi-hyeok returned to helmet-diving for seafood.

"My brother joked the diving gear here was so advanced, he could fall asleep underwater if he wanted to," Il-hyeok recalled.

Il-hyeok's girlfriend gave birth to their first child in the South. The couple married in 2024 and soon welcomed another daughter. Il-hyeok is finding his footing in the South's capitalist economy, trying part-time jobs at restaurants and operating forklifts and excavators.

The plunge into the South's noisy democracy was overwhelming. TVs offered endless channels—so different from the North, where only government broadcasts existed. Back home, Il-hyeok's used motorbike was a prized status symbol; now he found himself on highways crowded with modern cars. City squares rang with protests.

Yu-mi's mother marveled at faucets that produced both hot and cold water. On her first day working at a nursing home, she faltered when colleagues asked for "napkins"—another English word she'd never heard. The brothers' mother was scandalized by a TV drama in which a wife slapped her husband. And when Il-hyeok first ventured beyond Seoul, he dutifully called a police detective to ask for permission. The detective only laughed.

And then there were elections. In the North, people lined up in formal dress to receive a ballot with only one name. They placed their vote in the "yes" box with both hands and bowed deeply to portraits of Kim Jong Un's father and grandfather, who ruled before him. No one dared approach the "no" box. When Il-hyeok and his wife voted in June as South Korean citizens, they found voters arriving in shorts and slippers, earphones in place. The ballot was a bewildering list of names.

Yet South Korea was no paradise. After 19 months in the South, Yi-hyeok died in a diving accident in late 2024. The brothers' mother and Il-hyeok's wife were diagnosed with cancer.

Il-hyeok vented frustration at Seoul's soaring housing prices. He is saving every penny to move his family out of their cramped, government-subsidized rental apartment. Still, he insisted the defection was "100%" the right choice. Before his death, Yi-hyeok appeared on television, explaining that he fled to spare his children the indoctrination of North Korean schools. His daughter is now a second grader at a South Korean school, and his son is in kindergarten. The children adapted fastest to their new lives, quickly embracing South Korean staples like fried chicken and pizza.

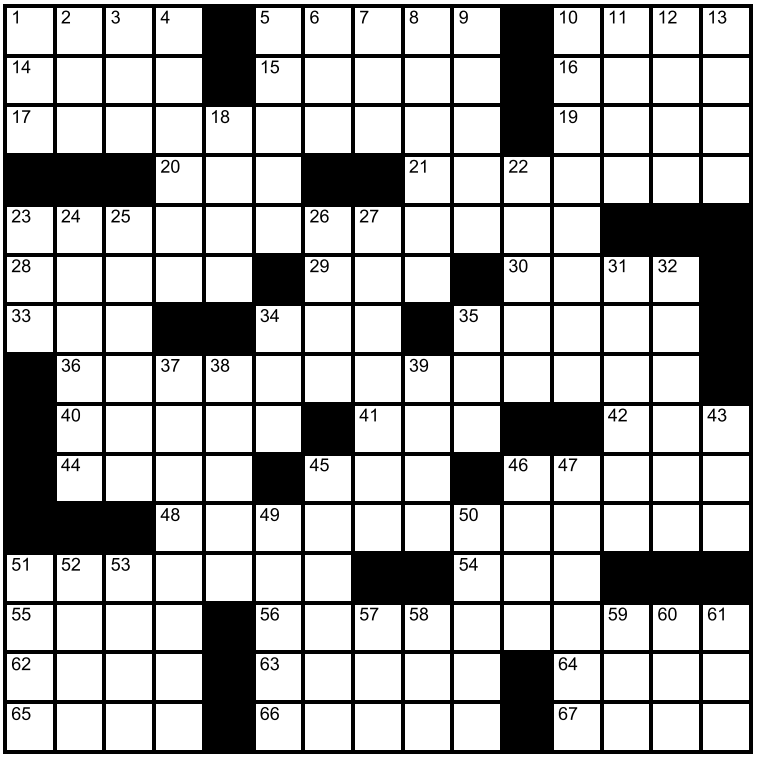
"My husband gave me and our children the freedom he promised before he died," Yu-mi said.

The brothers also honored their father's final wish: When their boat fled North Korea, they carried his ashes with them.

This article originally appeared in The New York Times. *Used with permission.*

The Puzzle Page

Crossword No. 851: Care for a Game of Bridge? by Matt Gaffney



ACROSS

1 Soldier for hire, briefly
5 Dropped-purse sounds
10 Orientation initialism
14 Tan cousin
15 Rapp in *Mean Girls*
16 Shouts of encouragement
17 A new bridge connecting Detroit and Windsor, Ontario, opened July 27; it's named after this Canadian hockey great
19 Man, in Milan
20 Services' counterparts (abbr.)
21 Drinks, amusingly
23 Pittsburgh's famous group of bridges spanning the Allegheny goes by this nickname; one of them is named for Pirates great Roberto Clemente
28 Banchero on the Orlando Magic
29 False front
30 Nerve fiber
33 One of the Kardashians
34 One of John Lennon's middle names
35 To the left or the right
36 Ayrton Senna, who was this kind of athlete, has a bridge named after him that spans Brazil's Paraná River
40 Put on the books
41 Chart variety
42 *Law & Order:* __
44 "...__ protest too much, methinks"
45 You, in German
46 Reply facilitators, briefly
48 On July 17, the city of Worcester, Mass., renamed a local bridge this after a historic Celtics star; yes, they noticed the pun on an aspect of the game he specialized in
51 Letter opener, sometimes
54 "Turn to Stone" band, 1977
55 Bar beneath a car
56 A bridge named for this NFL star, who left the league to fight in Iraq, affords close-up views of the Hoover Dam
62 Any of 100 in Scrabble
63 Printer brand
64 Ore deposit
65 Somewhat
66 Surname on farm equipment
67 Sound made after touching a hot pan

DOWN

1 Ryan of film fame
2 Green prefix
3 Basis of learning, initially
4 Heavy club
5 Lock of hair
6 Nervous little laugh
7 Game with Skip cards
8 Joyce in *Three's Company*
9 Ominous words from the teacher
10 France's "Sun King"
11 Amorphous amount, as of toothpaste
12 "It's Gonna __" (2000 NSYNC hit)
13 Possessive seen on Chinese menus
18 Logical start?
22 Luca __ (*The Godfather* character)
23 Toll road (abbr.)
24 The Little Red-__ Girl (Charlie Brown's crush)
25 Ray of laughter
26 Suffix with Victor or Dickens
27 One of a lofty dozen
31 Texas city named for a European city
32 Coolness under pressure
34 Spooky mo.
35 "__ we ready?"
37 Bengal or Siamese, say
38 Toyotas made until 2005
39 God, to many Belgians
43 Trio on warships
45 Kerfuffle
46 Pt. of a word
47 Harlem theater
49 Kangaroo, ostrich, or human
50 It created the banks in Paris
51 Hard numbers
52 Way out
53 Penne __ vodka
57 Mao __-tung
58 The Blue Jays, on scoreboards
59 Do the yard
60 Hullabaloo
61 Never before seen

The Week Contest

This week's question: A Japanese company is offering a new way to beat the heat: a one-person "human refrigerator" that blasts the sitting occupant with 41-degree air during a 5-to-10-minute session. In seven or fewer words, come up with an advertising slogan that could be used to pitch Americans on this cooling invention.

Last week's contest: The 1,204 members of a London WhatsApp group called "1 Million Beers" are photographing and documenting every beer they drink until they reach the seven-figure mark. They're on track to hit that target in 2034. If the group were to write a book chronicling the ups and downs of their boozy challenge, what should it be titled?

THE WINNER: "The Record Book of Guinness"
Moe Cougher, Olathe, Kan.

SECOND PLACE: "Our Staggering Achievement"
Rick Torrence, The Village, Okla.

THIRD PLACE: "The Audacity of Hops"
Mark Thermansen, Portland, Ore.

For runners-up and complete contest rules, please go to theweek.com/contest.

How to enter: Submissions should be emailed to contest@theweek.com. Please include your name, address, and daytime telephone number for verification; this week, type "Human refrigerator" in the subject line. Entries are due by noon, Eastern Time, Tuesday, Aug. 4. Winners will appear on the Puzzle Page next issue and at theweek.com/contest on Friday, Aug. 7. In the case of identical or similar entries, the first one received gets credit.

◀ The winner gets a one-year subscription to *The Week*.

Sudoku

Fill in all the boxes so that each row, column, and outlined square includes all the numbers from 1 through 9.

Difficulty: super-hard

					7			
		4				5		
	5	6	9				8	
8	3	5	6	7				4
6				5	9	3	7	1
	7				5	1	9	
		3				2		
			4					

Find the solutions to all *The Week*'s puzzles online at **theweek.com/solutions**

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—Mike Bisceglia, Founder, Stauer

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- Chrono Seconds and Minutes, Sun & Moon/24 hour & Date
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